

From the
Taming of "Godzilla" to
**THE
IMPOSSIBLE**

Bill Rudge



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From The Taming of “Godzilla” to THE IMPOSSIBLE

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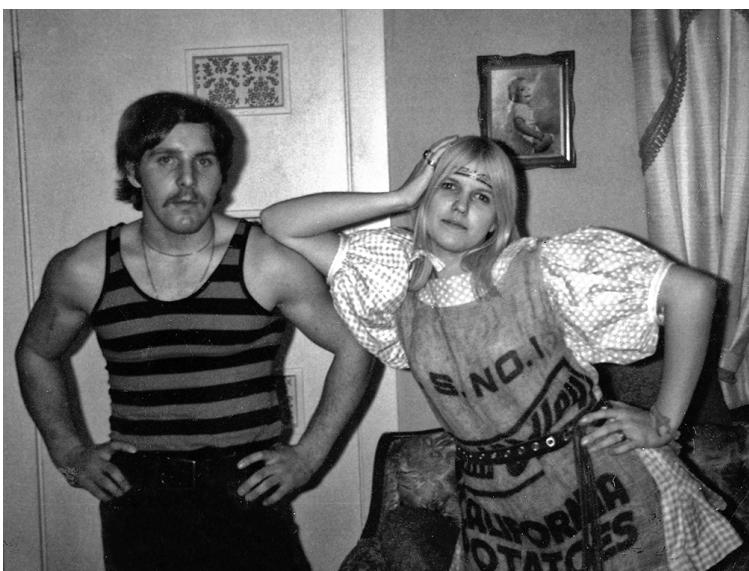
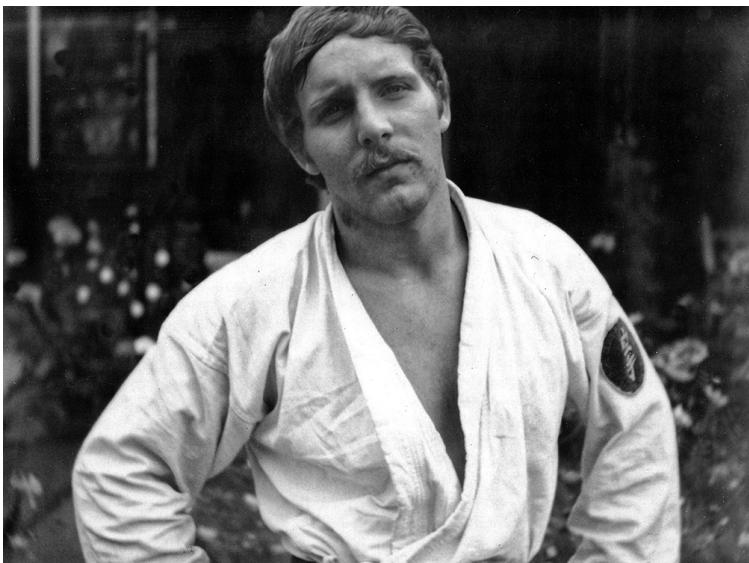
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Bill and Karen before accepting Jesus.

Preface

I rarely share my before-Christ testimony. I would rather write and speak about what Christ has done and is doing in my life. Nevertheless, in this book, I share highlights of my testimony, *The Taming of Godzilla*, to contrast and magnify *The Impossible* He has done in my life since coming to know Christ. However, there are some things from my past that only God knows—forever forgiven. There is nothing God will not forgive if you sincerely ask and truly repent.

All things are possible when we walk in God's will according to His Word and in the might of His Spirit! I hope that my sharing a glimpse of my life, both before and after coming to Christ, will inspire, encourage and strengthen you in your faith.

Childhood on the West Hill



My father was raised in a strict Catholic family in Howland Township, Ohio, and my mother was raised as a devout Protestant in Sharon, Pennsylvania. Once married, they chose to attend the Methodist church just down the street from our house on West State Street in Sharon, Pennsylvania. We lived in a house that was built by my great-grandparents, Walter and Flora Hall, in the 1800s. My great-grandparents must have been wealthy since my mother told me that they had the first telephone in Sharon and were invited to events at Frank and Julia Buhl's mansion. Frank and Julia were the most prominent family in our region. Sometime after my grandparents, John and Aurie Bombeck, passed away, the family wealth was lost, most likely during the Great Depression. The house we lived in when I was growing up was old and run down. It was a large house which made it too expensive for my father to do many repairs.

I was raised by wonderful parents, Frank and Florence Rudge, the fourth child of six, with two older brothers, an older sister and two younger brothers. We did not have much by way of material things, but we were happy and close (although my oldest brother was sometimes a little scary and unpredictable). My dad was always busy selling life insurance or making collections. I learned not to ask for rides to the Boy's Buhl Club or to Buhl Park to go swimming. He would agree to take me, but he usually had three or four stops along the way to collect insurance premiums. Everyone loved him and would invite him in for a cup of coffee, which he usually accepted. By the time I was dropped off at my destination, I could have walked it or ridden my bike several times there and back.

He worked long hours and often went without to provide for his family. Whenever available, my dad bought dented and outdated cans of food because they were greatly reduced in price. We had lots of vegetables and berries in

season from the large garden and berry patches he maintained. He was also the main cook, laundryman and groundskeeper for our home, so he loved it when one of my brothers or I would cut the grass for him.

During my youth, the custom for most families in my neighborhood when their family was eating was that friends had to wait in another room, rarely being invited to join in the meal. I usually sat in their living room savoring the smells while the family ate. One particular morning, Nicky's mother invited me to eat breakfast with them. They had delicious food I rarely had at home: sausage, biscuits, orange juice and dessert. I must have eaten too much because I was never asked to eat with them again.

All my friends adored my mom who was home all the time. I never remember her getting mad or yelling; she was firm but gentle natured. She did not cook because her younger twin brothers died as infants, so she was an only child and spoiled. Her main tasks as a mother were washing the dishes by hand, vacuuming, ironing our clothes and watching out the window as her little ones played in the yard.

My siblings and I had, for the most part, a great childhood and home life. Many friends came over to our house for a variety of activities from sitting on the porch watching the cars go up and down the hill to sleeping out under the stars in our side and back yards. During my younger childhood, my memories are more of playing alone or with my sister because our friends were not allowed to cross busy West State Street by themselves.

Spring was my time of sloshing through the melting snow, getting an early start on riding my bike out the avenue, enjoying the beauty of sprouting flowers and competing with my mother and sister to see who spotted the first robin. Summer was a time for wagon rides, makeshift go-karts, squirt gun battles, building tree cabins, underground forts, army battles in the field behind my house, playing badminton, step baseball and a variety of sports with siblings and friends or just lying in a hammock watching the birds and bees fly overhead. Fall was a time for playing football at Perkins and various lots throughout the West Hill, jumping in piles of leaves and building rooms and houses with the leaves. Winter was a time for sled riding, snowball fights and playing indoors with toy army men, cowboys and Indians.

One winter night, it was getting dark and colder. After hours of sled riding, my friends started leaving Perkins Hill one or two at a time to walk home. Eventually, I was alone, so I started walking uphill through Perkins toward my house. Halfway there, I was so exhausted from trekking through the deep snow that I just wanted to lay down and rest under an evergreen tree, but I knew that could be dangerous, so I continued to trudge through the snow. What a joy when I finally saw the lights of my house. After hours in the cold, my siblings and I would take turns standing on the register in the living room to warm up.

The Field and Perkins—My Stomping Ground

Behind our house was a large area encompassing many acres of high grass, jagger bushes, wild berries and so much more that we referred to as “the field.” The grass was often chest high, and the jagers (what we called them) were taller than us. Throughout my childhood, along with my brothers and our friends, we built tree cabins, underground forts, hidden tunnels through the grass and jagers. I had several secret tunnels under the jagger bushes (which were bent like an arch) in case a bully came through, so I could quickly escape. This only happened a few times because they quickly gave up after getting scratched by the thick jagger bushes when they could not find the entrance to my tunnel.

We would get refrigerator boxes and make them into tanks to roll over top of the jagers and make walking paths through the field. We also used to have some fun army wars and chestnut battles (using garbage can lids as shields) in this field.

There was also a place near our house called Perkins. It was a large estate that had an abandoned playhouse, delicious fruit trees and grape vines, a cement pool and so much more. As a child, I thought it was the Garden of Eden because it was so beautiful and secluded. I was certain that Adam and Eve had previously lived there.

I played there as a child and often talked with the workers. I have never forgotten when one of the older men broke a banana he was having for lunch and gave me half of it to eat. Then, there was Mr. Long, the groundskeeper who lived in a house on the Perkins’ estate with his wife. My friends and I must have tormented him by raiding the fruit trees and calling him Daddy Long Legs (a name my mother also called him when she was a child). He would tell us to get out of the fruit trees and chase us all over the property (he was older, so it was more of a walk)—a few times threatening to shoot us with rock salt. I never knew, until many years later, that he and his wife had lost their only son during the war. His wife, who was a very nice old lady, occasionally invited me into their house and served me cookies and milk. One time, Mr. Long came in the house and saw me sitting at his kitchen table. He was not happy (for those of you who know, like Mr. Wilson in Dennis the Menace), but she made him leave me alone as she assured him that I was a nice boy.

These areas were my childhood stomping grounds. This was the world I explored and roamed from age five onward. It was a magical place with many memories.

Stolen Music Box

My family did not have a lot of material possessions, so I started stealing at age five. I was playing at Mary’s house who lived on the far side of the field, still in the range of the region I freely roamed. In her bedroom was a music box that infatuated me. Needless to say, I stole it. A few days later, her older sister was at

my house with my sister when she noticed Mary's music box. I had to personally return it with a face-to-face apology to Mary and her mother. It did not change my heart. It just taught me to be more careful with items I stole.

Eye Surgery

At age five, I had an eye operation to cut out a small piece of my left eye damaged from someone's hot cigarette ash. Back in the 1950s, eye operations were primitive, and the outcome was uncertain. The worst part was the ether they used as a general anesthetic, which caused me to vomit for a couple of days. I was hospitalized for a week with a patch over my eye. Having four other children at home, my parents could only visit me in the hospital for 15-30 minutes each day.

My eye fully recovered but with some noticeable weakness. Several more eye injuries were to follow. The most painful one was from getting a paint chip in my eye while sleeping out on my friend's front porch, resulting in a corneal abrasion. I endured it as long as I could, finally getting eye salve from a doctor.

Niagara Falls

When I was five, my parents took our whole family to Niagara Falls. Driving on two-lane roads at that time, it was a five-hour trip instead of the three hours it currently takes via the interstate highways. We left early in the morning and viewed the falls from the New York side. My childhood memory recalls being so close to the falls, with only a low railing separating me from the rushing water, that I was afraid of being swept over—probably because my oldest brother pretended to push me over.

We made the long drive back home from Niagara Falls that same summer day. My brother Kenny and my sister Karen were in the back seat with me. Larry was in the front, in between my dad, who was driving, and my mother, who held my one-year-old brother Jeffrey on her lap. Around dusk, about 15 miles from Sharon, a car attempting to pass us collided head-on with a vehicle coming in the opposite direction. The impact was so close that my father could have reached out his arm and touched either vehicle. Several people died that night in the collision. My parents said it was a miracle that we were not killed, or even hurt, and that our car was not damaged. That was our first and last long-distance car trip and vacation. It is no wonder that, when I became a teenager, I had such a desire to travel and began to hitchhike all over the country.

Girl Hit By Motorcycle

I dearly loved my sister who was two and a half years older than me. She was like a second mom—always watching over me. While walking home from school when I was in first grade, I came across an accident scene where a blond-haired

girl in third grade was tragically hit and killed by a motorcycle. I looked at her mangled body and was certain it was my sister. I ran home terrified and traumatized. When I got home and discovered it was not my sister, I hugged and hugged her. It was only a few years later that my family would experience a similar nightmare, but more about that later.

Phobias from Larry

Most of my childhood fears and phobias were a result of my brother Larry's tormenting. (He was nine years older than me.) He would hold me down and say, "You can't move, you can't move!"—giving me claustrophobia. He would lock me in dark closets and tell me our big, old house was haunted and scare me about the spirits of dead relatives in the house who were coming to get me, giving me nyctophobia—fear of the dark. He would hold me over the upstairs banister and over the bridge above the Shenango River, threatening to drop me in, giving me acrophobia—fear of heights. Often, I had nightmares of falling and would sometimes wake up when I hit the floor beside my bed. As a young kid, these traumatized me.

When I was a young teenager, Larry took me and my friends out on his boat at the dam. It was March, and although the air was warm, the water was ice cold. Then, he made me jump out of the boat into the freezing water and would not let me back in the boat until I waterskied for a few minutes.

He really loved me; he just had a distorted way of proving it. Thinking it was making me strong, he could have marred me for life. Except for the Lord intervening and helping me to overcome, I would probably still be messed up and controlled by these phobias.

Smokey

I learned about death at a young age because many of our dogs and cats were hit by cars and left lying along the street or sidewalk in front of our house.

One of my favorite dogs was Smokey, a small black Scottie dog I dearly loved. One evening when someone opened the front door, he ran out and was hit by a car. I was devastated.

It was dark outside, and my father was unable to bury him, so he placed him behind the garage. I remember standing there the next morning, brokenhearted, staring at him before I went to school. All day in school, I was thinking about what I could do to bring Smokey back to life. With my childlike mentality, I thought that if I could just move Smokey's legs back and forth, he would start moving on his own and then suddenly jump up and start running around again!

I came home from school somewhat excited, anticipating Smokey coming back to life. I went behind the garage and grabbed Smokey's legs to move them, but he was stone cold and stiff as a board. I knew then that I could not bring him

back to life, so I helped my dad bury him. Several days later, I dug him up, thinking perhaps he may now be ready to come back to life. But, when I saw his decaying body covered with maggots, I was finally convinced that he was never coming back to life. So, I learned at a young age that death is final—at least for the physical body.

Jeffrey, My Seven-Year-Old Brother

I remember going to two Fourth of July Rudge family reunions. What I recall most are two large containers of ice cream, tubs of all kinds of ice-cold soda, delicious homemade pies and every imaginable dessert. There were always competitive sports among my dad's brothers and cousins. Each time, it was a wonderful day!

On July 4, 1963, the Rudge family reunion was at Lake Milton in Ohio. That day, my little brother Jeffrey Lynn Rudge, who had just turned seven in June, was spotted standing on the edge of the pier staring into the lake. Later that night, I heard my parents talking about how relieved they were that he had not fallen in and drowned.

The very next day, July 5, a seven-year-old friend of Jeffrey's called him several times to go with her for ice cream, so my mother reluctantly let him go. Jeffrey was supposed to be back in time to go to the Buhl Club with Kenny, who was an assistant physical instructor. However, Jeffrey did not get back in time, and Kenny had to leave for work without him. Because Jeffrey was late, my mother and oldest brother, Larry, waited for him on the front porch. My sister was in the kitchen ironing clothes. I am uncertain where my father was—either working or somewhere in the house.

The little girl's uncle dropped Jeffrey off at about 7:15 p.m. on the opposite side of West State Street, across from our house. He yelled, "Don't cross the street until I tell you." But Jeffrey apparently did not hear him. Why did he not pull into our driveway? Why would he let a little boy out of his car on the opposite side of a busy street to cross by himself? Why did he not escort him across, or at least wait for his mother or brother to cross with him? Perhaps he did not want to back out of our driveway onto a busy street or possibly the driveway was blocked by my dad's car. Maybe he was too tired to get out of the car to cross him. I am certain he never anticipated anything bad happening. There are so many questions that we will never have answers to until we cross over into eternity.

Walking by himself to the front of the car and barely able to see over the hood made it difficult for Jeffrey to see a car coming down the hill, and he was hidden from the oncoming driver. In addition, the sun shone brightly down West State Street directly into Jeffrey's face. He did not even see the big 1958 Oldsmobile car (driven by a man and his wife from Conneaut, Ohio) speeding down the steep hill. The driver put his foot on the brakes as quickly as possible

and veered to the left, but was unable to veer far enough because of an oncoming car.

When Larry saw Jeffrey get out of the vehicle unassisted, he started walking down the porch steps to cross with him. Jeffrey ran into the street intending to cross to the other side where his mother and brother were waiting for him, but he never made it. He was thrown 30 feet from the impact spot, knocking Jeffrey out of one of his white tennis shoes while my mother and brother watched helplessly and horrified from the front porch. A passing motorist carried his lifeless body into a neighbor's house where an ambulance and the police were summoned.

I had been playing on Logan Avenue, a couple of blocks from my home when I heard an ambulance siren blaring. Something spoke to my heart that little Jeffrey had been hit by a car, and I should run home. My friends said, "Billy, we hear ambulances all the time." But I said, "There is something different about this one." I arrived just as he was being carried out of a neighbor's house on an ambulance cot—blood all over his body and head. The sight was so traumatic that my mind has blocked a clear visual image. After the ambulance sped to the hospital, I began to cry because I knew Jeffrey was going to die. The mother of one of my friends said, "Kids get hit by cars all the time and they live," but I knew the way his body looked that he would not survive.

My older brother Kenny told me that as the screaming ambulance raced past the Buhl Club, he got a troubled feeling in his gut that something bad had happened to someone in our family. It was normal to hear ambulances go past the Buhl Club, but this one gave him an eerie feeling.

My father followed the ambulance to the hospital where the emergency room staff did all they could to save my brother. I cannot imagine my dad's broken heart when they pronounced his little son dead. He left the hospital and picked up Kenny at the Buhl Club. An hour or so after the accident, they pulled into our driveway. Our yard and neighborhood were filled with people. As soon as Kenny opened the car door, he fell out onto the driveway crying. I knew then that Jeffrey had died.

Jeffrey died from a broken neck, shattered jaw and collarbone, lacerations of the scalp, internal chest injuries and trauma from impact. It all happened so quickly! One moment, he was alive, and the next moment, he was gone. It felt as though someone cut open my chest, spread apart my rib cage and was squeezing my heart. If you have lost a loved one, you can identify with the trauma my family went through.

People came and brought lots of food to our house and many cried. But the world did not stop as I thought it should. The sun rose the next day, and I heard kids out on the avenue playing and laughing; cars kept going up and down West State Street.

The three days of viewings, followed by the funeral service (July 6, 7 and 8),

with the constant flow of people were agonizing for our grief-stricken family. At one point, my mother attempted to pull Jeffrey's body out of the casket.

No one in my family had an appetite; sleep eluded us. When I did fall asleep, Jeffrey was alive in my dreams, but as soon as I woke up, the nightmare of his death began again. I often had tormenting dreams, thoughts and memories about Jeffrey's death. Every time I heard an ambulance siren, my mind would instantly flash back to Jeffrey.

Following the funeral service, relatives, friends and neighbors gathered at our house. I sat with some of my friends and my brother Kenny's friends. As they ate from the bountiful supply of food brought to our house, someone told a joke. When I laughed with them, Kenny quickly and firmly said to me, "Our brother was buried today, so don't be laughing!"

My dad had never cried in front of his children, but shortly after Jeffrey's funeral, we saw him behind our garage sobbing. We never saw him cry again. My dad never talked about the accident afterward, just as he never talked about his service in the Army during WWII or the tragic death of his younger brother Milton. A few weeks later, he gathered up all of his children and had us baptized on Sunday, July 28, 1963, at Hickory Methodist Church; none of us realizing it was my 11th birthday.

I not only lost my younger brother, but I also lost my mother, father, sister and two older brothers—not physically, but emotionally. It was like living in a morgue. We were like walking dead, existing in a dark fog. Happiness, laughter and fun were replaced with sadness, numbness and isolation. There was no celebration of birthdays, or remembering Christmas or Easter the year following his death. At Sharon High School, I performed with the Whiz Kids for the Hoyle (basketball) Tournament the Saturday night before Easter. My parents never showed up to watch and my dad forgot to pick me up after the tournament was over. So, at the age of 11, I walked the long distance from Sharon High School to my house, alone.

My family never went to another Fourth of July family reunion because Jeffrey died the following day. Except for my mother who cried frequently and openly, we all kept our emotions bottled up—hardened from grief. At times, I kept myself so occupied there was little time to think about Jeffrey, while at other times of loneliness, I pondered his death—deeply and sorrowfully.

My last memory of Jeffrey before the accident was of him wanting to play with my new toy plastic hand grenade that used caps for sound effects. I regret having said, "No, you'll break it." Now, I would let him play with any of my toys and would not even care if he broke them all!

After Jeffrey was buried, I would sometimes look into the clear blue sky on a sunny summer day and think, "There has to be a God! My little brother was not just put into the ground to decay and deteriorate and turn to dust. There has to be life beyond the grave!" Although I acknowledged God, I did not know Him in

a personal way.

I also realized that everyone was powerless to bring my little brother back to life: not the police officers or ambulance personnel at the accident scene; not the doctors and nurses at the hospital; not the clergy who officiated at his funeral. No one and nothing could bring him back to life.

It is interesting that shortly before Jeffrey was hit and killed, he told my parents he would not be on earth much longer. They would also hear him on his play phone having a conversation with his grandmother who died when Jeffrey was one. We went to church and acknowledged God, but none of us really knew the Lord, except Jeffrey. To accomplish a future purpose beyond our comprehension at the time, God allowed Jeffrey to be taken as he was the only one ready after having just attended a week of Vacation Bible School at the nearby First Baptist Church.

After a long time of extreme grieving, someone reminded my mother that she had four other children who needed her attention. One day, while washing dishes, she felt someone push her across the kitchen floor. She was convinced it was an angel telling her that it was time to stop grieving. It took more than a year, but time, advice from others, her angel experience and the birth of Frankie, helped return joy to our family—but none of us would ever be the same.

Four months after my brother was killed, President John F. Kennedy was assassinated. Facing my personal family grief and then watching the whole country mourn made 1963 a very sorrowful year. All the sadness and loss, and later being taught the theory of evolution in seventh grade, set me on a course of rejection and rebellion toward God.

How could a loving God allow this? How could He allow my little brother's body to be broken, bruised and battered the way it was? How could He allow our President to be assassinated? How could He allow so many other tragedies and silently watch as innocent people suffer? Why would a loving God ever allow all of this to happen?

I had not only lost my brother, parents and siblings, but I lost my trust in God. I felt He did not care about me. Since He abandoned me and my family, I abandoned Him for letting a little boy get mangled by a speeding car.

At age 10, I stared into the casket of my little brother and pondered the question of death. It led me on a quest to discover if there is a God. My search would eventually cause me to realize there was a greater purpose through that tragic event as God brought good out of it. The good Lord has provided hope and assurance that I will one day see my brother again, providing all eternity to make up for what was lost in this life.

Frankie Born

One year and seven months after Jeffrey was killed, my youngest brother,

Frankie, was born. At age 44, our mother did not even think pregnancy was a possibility, so at first, the doctor thought she had a tumor. For several weeks, we were concerned that she would die until they realized she was pregnant. When Frankie was born, he looked so much like Jeffrey, our parents thought it was Jeffrey "reborn." They believed he was a miracle baby. Frankie's birth restored joy to our family. Although he remembers going to the cemetery many times as a child, sometimes to ride his bike while our parents planted flowers and maintained the family plots, Frankie does not remember ever being told by our parents how Jeffrey died.

First Cigarette Sets Field On Fire

I smoked my first cigarette with an older boy (I was 10 and he was 13) in the field behind my house. The high grass was dry and as we sat in the middle of the field smoking, and me coughing, the field caught on fire. We tried but were unable to put out the fire. We ran to my house, and my dad and brothers got shovels and rugs and finally put it out. Almost every year, I "accidentally on purpose" set the field on fire to clean out some of the brush. We could usually control the fire, but at least one time the smoke became so thick that the fire department came.

West Hill Elementary School

The houses of two of my childhood friends who lived at the far end of "the field" were torn down to make way for the new West Hill Elementary School. The city was also considering taking our house to make a roadway through the field to the school, but that never developed.

When I was 10 years old, the school was being built in the field. One day, my friends and I were messing around at the construction site and trying to operate the heavy equipment machinery. All of a sudden, the police showed up. We started to run away when an officer yelled, "Stop or I'll shoot!" We paused for a second, then kept on running, hoping not to be hit by a bullet. My heart was beating fast, and we were scared to death, but we were even more afraid of being caught. We hid in the high grass in the field where the officer could not find us.

At the beginning of sixth grade, I began attending the new school. Jeffrey would have started second grade. It was a new experience for me since three former elementary schools were now merged into this new school. It was also the first time I would not have to walk home from school for lunch because it had a cafeteria. While most students did not like cafeteria food, I enjoyed it throughout my school years, probably because meals at home were mostly toast with sugar and cinnamon, hot dogs, chicken or goulash.

Stealing from Murphy's

A couple of friends and I began to hit stores downtown and steal everything we could. One day after hitting Murphy's, we were walking down the alley behind the store examining our merchandise when a man asked where we got it. We said, "We bought it at Murphy's." He asked us to come inside and verify it. Turned out, he was the store manager. He did not turn us in to the police, but he did call our parents, and I was grounded for a week. I promised God I would keep the Ten Commandments, but I was soon back to stealing.

Escape from German Shepherd Attack

One summer when I was about 11, three of my friends and I were coasting on our bikes down Addison Road in Brookfield, Ohio, heading to the creek to explore and go swimming. About halfway down the isolated gravel road came a vicious German Shepherd dog from out of nowhere, apparently from a farm on the left side of us. We started peddling as fast as we could, but the dog headed straight for me. Certain I was about to be bitten, I took my left foot off the pedal and swung my left leg over to the right side of the bike for protection while still coasting down the road. The dog lunged at me knocking me down with the bike on top of me. One of the dog's fangs pierced my tire so deeply he could not get his mouth free. He thrashed his head back and forth, shaking my bike trying to get free. When he finally freed his fang, his mouth was so bloody he quickly turned and ran back home. That aggressive dog would have torn me up. I did not give it much thought then, only glad to have escaped his grasp. However, looking back many years later, I realized that God protected me from certain harm during that attack.

Pranks and Vandalism

Halloween was a fun time to dress up, collect candy and terrorize the neighborhood. My friends and I seemed to get in the mood for vandalism and act a little wilder than usual. After dark we would go on sprees slashing bike tires, car tires and convertible roofs, busting streetlights, soaping windows and other destructive acts.

We would take jack-o'-lanterns off people's porches and either smash them or roll them down West State Street. A few days before Halloween, we would knock on doors and say, "Trick or treat." Most would say, "Today is not Halloween!" We would nicely say, "Gee, we thought it was!" They would usually give us candy and money anyway.

On Halloween night, we sometimes would tie ropes between two trees across the sidewalk. As the trick-or-treaters walked by, we would pull the rope taut, tripping them. Then we would take their candy and run. A few times, we put paper bags containing dog manure on front porches then light the bag on fire, ring the doorbell and hide to watch someone come out in their slippers or bare feet to stomp out the fire.

While walking home from parties on the East Hill, we sometimes tore down Christmas lights in the “rich” neighborhood. We also set fire to bags filled with sand holding lit candles to illuminate the roads at night on New Year’s Eve.

Clothesline Caper

One summer, four of my friends and I did what was later identified as the “Clothesline Caper.” We ran through yards at night cutting and slashing clotheslines throughout the West Hill. One of my friends got clotheslined by one we must have missed cutting. He landed on his back and had a burn mark across his neck for several days. He looked sort of strange wearing turtlenecks or buttoned-up shirts in the summertime.

It was finally figured out by the process of elimination who the culprits were because practically everyone’s clotheslines were cut except for five families, mine and my four friends. We should have cut our own to throw them off.

Mrs. Brazine—Raiding Gardens

We did cruel things to people without ever thinking about the hurt we may cause them. For example, there was a white-haired old woman named Mrs. Brazine who lived in my neighborhood. Out of ignorance and fear, I thought she was a witch. I often had nightmares of her trying to kill me. In my dreams, she was trying to force her way into our house by attempting to break the chain on the back door while stabbing at me with a butcher knife as I tried to hold the door shut. Many nights, I woke up terrified. I told my friends about the dreams, and then succumbed to their ideas to have some late-night fun at her expense.

She had chickens, so my friends and I would sleep out in my yard and shoot her chickens with BB guns. We would also raid and mess up her garden. A few years later, when I was a teenager, this little old woman asked me to come up to her house and write letters for her. Reluctantly, I made my way into her home, afraid she might poison me or cast a spell on me. Instead, I found a kind person who was hurting. She was very poor and away from her family. Being a German immigrant, she did not speak English very well. With poor eyesight, she could not see well enough to write letters to her family. When I discovered the difficulties with which she had to live, I felt sorry for the cruel things I had done to her and was kind to her thereafter.

Terrified of the Dark

The big old house I lived in had been in the family for almost 100 years, spanning five generations. During those early times, funerals were held in the house. Caskets with the bodies of the deceased were put in the living room for several days. I still remember seeing my next-door neighbor’s body in a casket in his living room.

Across the street from my house, beneath a block of old houses, lay the remains of a cemetery. The bodies and gravestones were moved in the 1870s to a new cemetery. Because of the poor quality of the pine box coffins, some of the remains were not recovered. Some say the former tenants never moved out and others tell tales of paranormal activity.

I was terrified of the dark from all the stories I heard about ghosts and spirits floating around the house. Watching horror movies contributed to my fear. My oldest brother loved to traumatize me by locking me in dark rooms and closets upstairs in our house. I was scared to go upstairs at night by myself, thinking all those ghosts and spirits in the house would get me.

Sometimes I would have to be upstairs in the back bedroom all alone at night. If I thought I saw or heard something, or had a nightmare, I would dash down the hall. To save time and not get grabbed by someone or something I thought might be hiding around the corner or in the front bedroom, I would jump over the banister and land halfway down the steps. My heart would be racing.

Walking Up West State Street at Night

When walking home alone after dark from the Buhl Club as a kid, I felt safe in downtown Sharon because it was lit up. I also felt secure as I approached the bottom of West State Street because there were three churches on the corner—St. John's Episcopal Church, Sacred Heart Church and First Baptist Church—and Sharon Methodist Church a block over. What could happen to someone near a church?

Once past the churches, the rest of the trek up the dimly lit steep West Hill was unsettling, especially while passing (as quickly as possible) the large old, abandoned Perkins' estate which was surrounded with a black wrought iron fence that bordered the sidewalk. My older brothers assured me that spirits of dead people buried in Perkins and goblins and ghouls were lurking in the dark shadows. So that I would not be grabbed out of the darkness, I speedily walked or ran on the outer edge of the sidewalk close to the street—sometimes in the street when no cars were coming—to have a little light from the few streetlights and to distance myself from the wrought iron fence. Sometimes, I chose the sidewalk on the opposite side of the street where there were some houses with lights on inside or an occasional porch light on, but those old houses looked spooky at night, too. Even my brother Kenny, who was six years older than me, would start running 20 yards before the dark area by the wrought iron fence and not stop until in front of our house.

Walking up West State Street in October was especially unsettling because it was dark and scary. The sound of leaves crunching under my feet incited my young imagination to run wild. When I thought I heard footsteps behind me or saw a shadowy figure on the other side of the black wrought iron fence, I would freeze. If the footsteps continued to crackle on the dry leaves, I would take off

running up the hill as fast as I could.

One night, I watched a horror movie in which a priest taking confession reached through the curtain and stabbed the woman to death. From that time on when walking up the West Hill at night, I no longer walked near the churches for protection.

Fascination with the Occult

Occult television shows and movies in my house and at theaters, and spooky stories about ghosts and hauntings intimidated, intrigued and influenced me. Tales around a campfire while sleeping out in the summer and stories told by my older brothers about spirits of dead relatives upstairs in our house frightened but infatuated me. My mother often told me that the voices of departed relatives could be heard in the walls of our house.

When I was about eleven, I had twenty-one warts on my hands for which I tried every remedy imaginable to remove them but to no avail. Finally, an old woman who lived next door offered to buy them from me. She gave me a dime, and within a few days, they all mysteriously vanished.

Superstitious beliefs held me captive. Walking under a ladder or crossing the path of a black cat were considered to be signs of bad luck. A bird hitting our window was considered an omen of impending death or doom. I had amulets for protection. I kept a rabbit's foot in my front pocket for good luck. As a teen, I wore a necklace with a tiki (Polynesian amulet believed to possess magic powers).

I loved the thrill and the chill of going through haunted houses, especially those where genuine paranormal phenomena were supposedly occurring. I enjoyed watching occult movies and television shows such as *Dark Shadows* and reading books and magazines on witchcraft and developing occult powers, but I hated the consequential dread and depression.

My quest for spiritual reality (experiencing something beyond me), my wish for power (over others, circumstances and nature), wanting to contact "the other side" (to communicate with Jeffrey and to discover what lies beyond the grave), yearning to learn hidden knowledge (unknown to most people) and longing to see into the future led me to experiment with the occult.

I participated in séances and used Ouija boards in hopes of contacting my younger brother and other deceased relatives. A couple of times, I led a séance in the church I attended with other teens—including the pastor's daughter. (The "genuine" contacts I did have, I now know were counterfeit and demonic in nature.)

My fascination with the occult progressed beyond séances and Ouija boards into reading my horoscope, fortunetelling, attempting to levitate myself or others, hypnotizing people, using magic, casting spells and other occult practices.

When something did not work as quickly and effectively as I wanted, I got bored and moved on to something else. I delved into positive thinking, visualization and attempted to develop psychic powers, believing that my thoughts could influence people and events in the world around me.

It is hard to believe, but I never really pondered the true source behind the superstitions and psychic powers. Nevertheless, I came to know the reality of the forces of darkness which gave me some deluded arrogance but also a great deal more terror and trauma.

Nightmares and Nosebleeds

Frequently, I had nightmares, some more often than others. One recurring dream I had for several nights was when I was trying to go downstairs to my parents' bedroom, a mouse that was sitting on the steps would bite me on the foot. I could not move or speak to call my parents for help. Another repeated nightmare is the one about Mrs. Brazine attempting to force open the back door while trying to stab me with a butcher knife as I held the door, hoping the chain lock would not break.

I often dreamed about flying. Sometimes, in my dream, I would take off running, put my arms straight out and begin to fly. Other times, my oldest brother, Larry, would be chasing me out the avenue, and I would begin to fly—usually about four feet in the air and just a few feet in front of him. One of my favorite dreams was flying around the gym in the Super Circus.

Another dream I have never forgotten was about a horse in our garage that I always wanted. However, while I was riding it around our yard, it would turn into a bear and start to chase me. Then, there was the dream about Russians upstairs in my house holding me captive and not letting me go downstairs. After a few nights of this repeated dream, I told myself before going to bed to pinch myself during the dream to wake up. It worked that night, and I woke up in a cold sweat. However, when I had the dream again, I pinched myself and only dreamed I was awake. I was not awake because the dream about the Russians upstairs holding me captive continued. Now, I felt powerless to stop this nightmare. After a few more times, I never had it again.

To make matters worse, I would often wake up in the middle of the night with blood all over my pillow from nosebleeds.

My various dreams and nightmares seemed to reflect some of my aspirations and fears as a child. The dreams I have had since becoming a Christian are usually more exciting and adventurous; often involving some sort of ministry, missions, rescuing others and trying to get back home. In these dreams, the Lord protects me, and I am able to survive and win.

Junior High



Whiz Kids

From about kindergarten to seventh grade, I spent a lot of time at the Buhl Club. I loved going there and benefited greatly from many positive experiences and lessons. We played basketball and many other fun activities which kept me occupied and out of trouble. During an annual Super Circus, I won the first-place trophy for the fastest rope climb from the floor to the gymnasium's high ceiling.

I became a Whiz Kid, a well-known acrobatic team at the Buhl Club. We performed various feats such as floor routines doing somersaults, table routines using a mini trampoline during which we slid, dove and flipped over a long rectangular table and routines using a full-sized trampoline for a variety of audiences and events. The pinnacle of our accomplishments was being on *Ted Mack and the Original Amateur Hour*—one of the premiere national television programs of its time to showcase talent.

Every year, the Buhl Club sponsored the Super Circus. One of the performances I did—which I inherited from my older brother Kenny who had also been a Whiz Kid—was for the grand finale. I would get on the trampoline in the center of the gym and put a blue cloth-like bag over my head that hung down to my knees. With a Whiz Kid standing on two opposite corners of the trampoline twirling a long rope around me, I would do multiple back flips in a row (up to 25)—with the bag remaining over my head and body. The most challenging part for me was the dizziness afterward and then slightly staggering across the trampoline to dismount.

Junior High Peer Pressure

Kenny was assistant to AJ Record, who was the physical director at the Buhl

Club. Kenny kept a watchful eye on me and prevented me from getting into trouble. But as soon as he graduated from high school, he was gone most of that summer. Then, he headed off to college in the fall. Just turning 12 and starting seventh grade, peer pressure took over my life. I drifted from the Buhl Club and gymnastics. Despite warnings from my sister and many others, including Mr. Record, my gymnastics instructor at the Buhl Club, I began hanging around with the “hoods” and the rough kids from the West Hill. It broke Mr. Record’s heart to see me quit the Whiz Kids (six years later I would visit him at his house before he died).

The guys I hung around with wore black denim or leather jackets and were involved in smoking, drinking, stealing, gambling, fighting, vandalism and sex. I wanted to be accepted and part of that group, so I conformed and acted like them. I started smoking and drinking regularly at age 12, and back in the 1960s, my friends and I were considered the “bad kids.”

There was no room for gymnastics in my life now. I even allowed my friends to pressure me to go with them instead of staying home to watch my performance on *Ted Mack and the Original Amateur Hour*.

That Sunday afternoon in October 1964 when the Whiz Kids performance was airing on *Ted Mack*, I went hiking with my friends in Superior Woods. We came upon a farm and found some cows and horses. We chased them around until we were able to put a canteen around the neck of one of them and used that as a bridle to ride it. Out of nowhere, several of the farm owner’s large dogs came charging towards us. They held us at bay against the fence until the owner came, and after a harsh warning, he let us go.

It would not be until 48 years later, after purchasing a copy of the *Ted Mack* show I was on, that I was able to watch my performance for the first time.

There were two sets of train tracks in downtown Sharon—one on the east side and one on the west side. You could be delayed by a train at any time. Oftentimes, with a stopped train, I would follow the older guys and crawl under it. A few times, it suddenly jerked and began moving, either forward or in reverse. None of my friends were run over, but there were accounts of other people who were hit and killed by the trains while crawling under them.

Junior high (grades 7-9) was a time of insecurity and being overly self-conscious. Being in seventh grade and only 12 years old made me extremely sensitive about how I looked. I wish I knew back then what I learned from serving as a youth pastor for many years—every teenager has insecurities, fears and phobias, and everyone has something they wish they could change about themselves.

Evolution in the Seventh Grade

In seventh grade biology class, I had my first exposure to the theory of evolution, which in the 1960s was equated with atheism. We observed live tadpoles as the

teacher explained how they evolved into frogs, then we dissected them. He spoke with such certainty concerning humans evolving from apes that I thought it might be true, but I also believed what I had been taught in church—that God created all things.

Nevertheless, now I had the excuse to live any way I wanted. If we evolved from apes, then I might as well act like an animal. There was no need for a moral code, so I could justify lying, stealing, vandalizing and all other such behaviors. My conscience was free from feelings of guilt. I was now my own god and master of my fate. I reasoned that I better get all the pleasure possible from this life because who really knows what lies ahead.

I continued to go to church with my family, but it was just a mundane routine. The dichotomy of believing in both atheistic evolution and God as creator never occurred to me as I wavered back and forth in my beliefs.

From Respect for Church to Rebellion

Although raised in church, God was always a vague, mystic “somebody” who watched me from afar. I knew about God and believed a Supreme Being existed, but I never knew God in a real and personal way. I figured He was only interested in my life on Sunday mornings or when I died. I thought that, as long as I occasionally went to church and at least believed in God and tried to live a somewhat good life, I would make it into heaven.

I enjoyed church as a child and had some wonderful Sunday School teachers, but as a teenager, I became bored with church. During the Sunday morning service, I would always stare out the windows of the balcony and dream about being someplace else—especially on beautiful summer days when I could hear through the open windows the loud roar of motorcycles, or a carload of young people drive by laughing and having a good time.

Many times, Dennis, a friend from church, would sneak out with me and go over to Smith’s Drug Store. Our parents usually sat below in the main sanctuary, so it was easy to slip out until Dennis’ mother got wise to us and began sitting in the balcony. Then, we had to be a little more creative to get away. My main prayer during the church service was to stay awake, but I often dozed off as boredom and disinterest overtook me. One time, I got caught by an adult in a dark room with the pastor’s daughter who was also a teenager in my grade.

My respect for the church faded, and I changed from a child who revered it to a rebellious teen who broke into a church and stole from it. Often, I would get into the refrigerator at my church and other churches and drink the communion grape juice. I mean, I could drink, steal, vandalize, fight, gamble and engage in premarital sex, but as long as I did not murder people, then I thought I was good enough.

The only time I wanted God around as a teenager was when I was in trouble and needed help. Then, I would get very spiritual. I would get out a Bible and lay

my hands on it and pray, “Oh God, if You get me out of this mess, I will change!” Once the crisis passed, so did my promise to the God of the Bible. My commitment was superficial. I only wanted a “crisis-oriented” relationship. When I was in a crisis, I wanted God’s help. When everything was going well, I did not want Him interfering with my life.

It would be several years later that the smoke screen of my belief in evolution was challenged. I had to do a lot of searching, seeking and investigating before I realized I had believed a lie. My personal search led me to an undeniable conclusion: our universe and everything in it was created by God. The evidence was overwhelming for the claims of the Bible and Jesus Christ. Since surrendering my life to Christ, I have met and befriended several scientists who share a similar story—after examining the evidence, they also came to a personal faith in Jesus Christ.

The Shack and the Mansion

Several friends and I built a shack behind my garage with discarded materials we gathered from throughout the neighborhood. Known as “Rudge’s Shack,” it became notorious during our junior high years. My older brother had a shack there when he was my age, and he and his friends never caused any trouble. So, my parents had no reason at the time not to trust me or my friends since our yard and house were often filled with young people. Our shack had electricity (an extension cord strung like a clothesline from my house), two old couches that unfolded into sleepers, wall-to-wall and ceiling-to-floor used carpeting, lights and a small electric heater for the winter. It even had fiberglass curtains someone contributed. One day, Nicky, who we were mad at for some reason, came to the shack. We stripped him down to his underwear and wrapped him in the fiberglass curtains. We then let him put his clothes back on. He walked home scratching and crying.

The shack was the highlight of our junior high years, an exciting place to hang out. Sometimes, we held smoking and drinking parties or played poker and blackjack. Occasionally, we had stealing contests where we would go to stores in downtown Sharon and return to the shack to see who stole the most. Many daring girls visited the shack, but not the ones who wanted to maintain a good reputation.

My parents never really knew what was going on. My dad was always busy trying to make a living selling insurance, and my mother always believed the best of her children. I did not want to hurt my parents because of the suffering they had endured through Jeffrey’s death. However, I also liked to party and have fun, so I learned to be good at living a double life in front of my parents. Even to this day, it depends on who you talk to. Some say I was a nice-mannered kid like my mother and others thought, while those who saw the different side of me, say I was wild and crazy. They were both right.

Down from the shack was an abandoned mansion. One day, Perry, an older youth who was with us, threw a rock through one of the windows. Thus began a long and destructive escapade of vandalism. We eventually broke most of the windows, tore down the banister, ruined a piano, demolished three huge stained-glass windows and did thousands of dollars of damage. This vandalism went on for weeks, and I wondered why the police never caught us.

Drunk

Bruce, a friend of mine, and I got very drunk at the shack and then went downtown where I almost fell through a large storefront window. We were thrown out of the Girls' Buhl Club. I then called Paul, a man I worked for, to give us a ride. He picked us up near Sharon General Hospital just seconds before the police arrived to pick us up. As we were driving away in his truck, we saw the police looking for us. We threw up all over Paul's house and all over a sweater I borrowed from my brother Kenny. I had to splash cologne all over it, so my parents would not smell the booze. I was sick for two days. I vowed to only drink on holidays after that.

More Vandalism at the Mansion

One Sunday afternoon, a friend of mine came over from the East Hill (the rich side of town) and wanted to go to the mansion. I knew things were getting hot, so I stayed back in the bushes watching as he stood on the front porch and yelled, "Hey, Rudge, watch this!" Just as he raised a brick over his head preparing to throw it through a large front window, a police cruiser came flying up the drive to the mansion. My friend looked at the police, and then at the brick. Not knowing what to do with the brick, he threw it through the window. They arrested him along with a few others they caught on the roof. He cried his eyes out. Along with the others they caught, he gave the names of everyone else that were involved.

They rounded up more than 40 perpetrators, but only thirteen of us were prosecuted. We received a year's probation and had to pay a fine. The police detective who interrogated me took a quick dislike to me as I did with him. I was only 12 years of age, but he kept writing down that I was 13. My father said, "The kid is 12! Put him down as 12." He said, "It doesn't matter whether he is 12 or 13." He was attempting to label me as the ringleader, so my being 13 would have helped his case instead of me being only 12 and one of the youngest.

Excerpts from the *Sharon Herald* newspaper, May 13, 1966:

"13 Nabbed for Vandalism at Mansion"

A new episode of mass teenage malicious mischief in Sharon was disclosed today by police in announcing the apprehension of 12 boys and one girl who admitted being responsible for much of the \$3,902 in

damage discovered at the former Stevenson Mansion on North Irvine Avenue.

Patrolmen William V. and James Lavin made the first three apprehensions after the cruiser-men investigated a report about 5:10 p.m. Sunday, May 1, that children were on the roof of the old mansion. The teenage girl had to be rescued by police after she climbed onto the roof of the highest tower of the mansion and got stuck after trying to hide from the officers.

The junior high school-age youths were questioned by police in the presence of parents and school officials. Chief Earl H. Holby said his department has 13 signed statements from the 13 primarily responsible for the damage. These statements and other information would be forwarded to the juvenile court. Holby declined to release the names of the youths involved, although he indicated that at least two of the boys, who were either directly involved or went to the Stevenson Mansion out of curiosity, came from prominent families.

Police said at least 21 plate glass windows, including six stained glass types, were found smashed in the house. A stairway railing leading from the first to the third floor inside the dwelling was destroyed.

Most of the 35 to 40 boys who visited the home went there out of curiosity after rumors circulated at the junior high school that a gang had engaged in extensive destruction at the old mansion that once was one of Sharon's most stately homes.

The dwelling in recent years served as a kindergarten for Sacred Heart Church and was purchased last November by Fairway Homes from the William Young family.

Several of the boys had removed furnishings from the property and these were later recovered from what police described as a "shack" in the West Hill area.

The destruction left by teenagers at the Stevenson Mansion was the largest since a gang of boys in a wild spree of malicious mischief virtually wrecked the interior of a home of a prominent industrialist on Highland Rd. and left behind about \$16,000 in damage several years ago.

Rock Band

In ninth grade, I was asked to play bass guitar for a newly formed rock band. They only asked me to join because I had a new amplifier. I could not play very well because I had only taken a few lessons.

My sister, who was in eleventh grade at the time, was dating a guy who was the best bass guitar player in the region and who played for a very popular band in our area. To spend time with her, he taught me bass guitar lessons. I bought a used guitar and a new amplifier. However, after a few weeks, my sister dumped

him, and the lessons stopped.

When we played for an event, I would just play anything that looked impressive. One of our gigs was at my home church. Everyone there thought I really knew how to play because I was moving my fingers all over the neck and strings of the guitar, but I merely turned the volume on the amplifier all the way down as I stood there smiling and pretending to play.

The guys in our band were the first in our school to grow long hair. I never let mine grow much below my collar because it looked too feminine to me. One of the guys in the band got a free haircut by some football players who held him down.

Before long, the guys in the band were able to afford their own equipment, and I was quickly replaced. A few of them went on to play in Blue Ash, a well-known band in our area that became popular in other states and countries.

High School



“Bushwhacking” and Booze

As teenagers, my friends and I loved to go drinking and “bushwhacking” out by the local Shenango Dam. An older friend Allan (age 17) who had a car, would drive us down secluded dirt roads where it was pitch black except for the stars and moonlight. Then, we would park, drink, smoke and go “bushwhacking.” This is when you find a parked car with a guy and a girl in it. Sneaking up on them, we would bang on the car loudly while shining flashlights in the windows, terrifying them.

One night while “bushwhacking” with my friends, we spotted a compact sports car parked out in the open. We thought this car was so small that there was probably only one little guy in there with his girl. Five of us jumped out of our car while the driver stayed at the wheel, ready for a quick getaway just in case there was trouble. Then came the “bushwhacking”! With flashlights in hand, we quietly crept up on them and shined our lights in the car while banging loudly on the windows. Usually this would terrify them, but this night the joke was on us. Two huge older guys got out of the sports car and chased us back to ours.

All five of us piled into the back seat, slammed the doors shut and locked them, just as one of the guys began pounding on the window and shouting to our driver, “Roll down the window!” Naturally, the driver shook his head “no,” so the guy started hitting the window with his forearm. Finally, our car started, and we took off. We almost stopped for an oncoming train, but when we saw them in hot pursuit, we took off across the tracks, making it just as the train whizzed by.

Later, they caught up with us in the parking lot of a local teen hangout, and the biggest of the two men wanted to fight all of us at the same time. We

declined, having ironically become the victims of terror and humiliation.

When I would go parking or drinking alone with a girl, I would back into some bushes where no one could spot us or sneak up behind us and “bushwhack” us. I kept the doors locked and the keys in the ignition, ready to take off in case of any trouble.

Lifestyle Changes

After some of my older friends got their driver’s licenses (a few even had their own cars), we would go out drinking at the Shenango Valley Dam off Trout Island Road where there were many secluded areas. Sometimes, we would roll up all the windows in the car and then five or six of us would puff on cigarettes as fast as we could until dense smoke filled the car. We could barely see each other or out the windows. This, however, greatly burned my sensitive eyes, and I soon quit smoking altogether.

I reconnected with a few friends I had not seen for a while. They were into sniffing glue and gasoline. I tried it once and knew that was not for me. So, once again, I distanced myself from them. Another guy I hung out with was so hard up for alcohol that he tried drinking perfume to get high. I took one swig, but never again.

Even before becoming a Christian, I realized the adverse effects of smoking, alcohol and drugs. My older brother Kenny had warned me of the potential dangers, and my own observations made me aware of the consequences he had warned me about. I remembered well the hangovers from drinking and the nausea and puking out my guts. I knew that was not freedom. That was not living.

I saw people getting messed up, with bloodshot eyes, beer bellies, mental confusion and looking older than their age. I realized that my memory was decreasing from my continual drinking. I noticed other adverse consequences in me and others, so I decided I would rather be healthy and look young.

I experimented with drugs a few times and smoked marijuana several times. My oldest brother Larry tried to get me to use drugs because, in the 1960s, he thought they would be a cure for all his problems. I tried them a few times with him but loved my body and mind too much. I decided that drugs were not for me. Instead, I would only smoke marijuana occasionally and only get drunk on weekends and special occasions.

My strategy was to focus on lifting weights and getting stronger while others burnt themselves out with drugs or overindulged with alcohol. Then, I would be able to beat up all of them.

Barrel Dropped On Head

When I was about 15, my friends and I planned a summer day trip to Cedar Point Amusement Park. Our 17-year-old friend agreed to drive his car for the three-hour ride. Since I enjoyed Conneaut Lake Park when I was younger—especially riding the old wooden Blue Streak roller coaster—I was looking forward to the bigger and faster steel roller coasters at Cedar Point.

The day before we were to leave, I was helping a friend, Gary, unload a pickup truck full of junk for Chuck, an older friend of his from Brookfield. Gary accidentally dropped a large rusty barrel filled with trash off the back of the truck. The end of the barrel hit me on the head leaving a large gash that required several stitches. Not about to miss Cedar Point, I still went with my friends the next day. However, my head throbbed so terribly on just the tame rides, that although greatly disappointed, I chose not to ride the roller coasters. The amusement park was not as much fun as I initially anticipated and the three-hour ride back home late at night was dreadful, but I survived it.

Haunted House

A carload of my friends and I decided to take on a haunted house in a nearby city, bragging about our courage all the way. Hearing stories about older gang members who supposedly went through this haunted house with guns yet came out terrified, only intensified our excitement. We were brave all right, until we found out we were not permitted to go through the house as a group but had to go individually. Eerie music filled the waiting room, creating an atmosphere of impending danger and fear. We were each given a candle and matches to go through the dark mansion alone.

As I entered the first room, there were caskets and what appeared to be dead bodies lying in them. At the bottom of the steps, as I was preparing to go to the second floor, my candle blew out. I fumbled in absolute darkness to find the matches to light it and cupped my hand around the candle flame to keep it from blowing out again. My heart was racing, but I continued through the remainder of the house alone.

I later discovered this was no mere haunted house with people dressed up to scare you. The man who owned the house was deeply involved in the occult and satanism. Genuine phenomena were occurring in that place. He even offered a large sum of money to anyone who would stay all night there on Halloween. No one I knew ever accepted.

The “Snitch”

About this time, I was being targeted by two older guys (ages 19 and 23) who were seeking revenge for some incidents from the past. For a couple of months, as I walked home from school, a car would pull alongside and slowly drive beside me as the 19-year-old (I could not see the driver) threatened physical violence, although he never got out of the car. A few times while I was gambling with

some guys from a neighboring city, this 19-year-old would unexpectedly show up at the front door of the house. I could not figure out how he knew where I was or who was sending him after me. One night, he showed up again at our gambling party. When I was informed he was at the front door waiting for me, I exasperatedly said to a buddy there, “This guy has been pursuing me for months, so I am going to go out and fight him. Come along, and if he seems to be winning, jump in.” When he saw both of us coming out the front door, he said, “I got jumped by two guys last week,” as he backed away toward his car. I never saw him again.

A few years later, Nicky (a “friend” who was at every gambling party), was killed in a car crash. I realized that he had reported my location to the 23-year-old, who then sent the 19-year-old after me.

Football

During my junior year of high school, after just turning 16, I went out for football. Some of my friends—who were not on the team—said I would quit within a few weeks. Although I was a rookie and inexperienced, I was determined to stick it out. Unlike junior high basketball, where I was cut after the first practice, no one was cut in football—you just quit.

In August, the football team began its two-a-day workouts, which lasted for two torturous weeks. The air was filled with the most terrifying grunts and groans as the players were pushed to the brink of exhaustion.

During the preseason, the coach noticed that I was strong for my size. I only weighed 160 pounds but was able to bench press 250 pounds, so the coach would say to his upper-class players, “Look at Rudge, he is benching more than you big linemen.” That did not make me very popular with them. A few times, they formed a circle around me during practice, so the coaches could not see. They would hit me with their forearms and helmets and kicked me with their practice spikes, but I still would not quit.

Even though I sat on the bench most of the time during games, I did not quit. I did not play in any varsity games my junior year and only in about five quarters my senior year. In the few games I did play, after the defensive play was called in the huddle, I would have to ask another player what I was supposed to do.

Part of that was my own fault because, when the coach would put me in during practice, I would not know the plays or was skipping practice altogether due to chasing girls. I sealed my fate when I skipped a game for a party. Realizing I might be thrown off the team, I drove alone that night to the game (over an hour away), arriving too late to suit up.

My main reason for going out for football was for the physical conditioning. I was not motivated enough to really want to play. My goal was to stick it out and that is all I achieved. You will never go higher than your goals. It was midway through my senior season when I finally became motivated to play, but by then,

it was too late. The coaches had given me chances, but I wasted them.

Several years later, I sponsored a multimedia assembly at an area high school entitled "Champions." Its basic message was that no matter what your circumstances or obstacles, if you have determination, you can be a champion. A true champion never gives up, never quits. Some of the film footage showed a Vietnam vet who had both legs blown off, yet he refused to give up and became a weightlifting champion. The school principal told me after the assembly that one of the worst students came up to him and said, "Maybe there is still hope for me."

Walking down the aisle to the front of the auditorium was a teacher who was now one of the football coaches. As he came toward me, I recognized him as one of the big upper-class linemen who had beat on me at football practice during my rookie year. My mind flashed back, and I thought he was going to forearm me upside the head and say, "You were a rookie then, Rudge, and as far as I am concerned you are still a rookie." However, he walked up to me, looked me right in the eye and said he thought my assembly was one of the best ever.

Tore Apart Pop Bottle Room

I worked at Kroger grocery store the summer before my senior year. The manager said I was one of the best workers, and when I quit to play football, he said he would hire me back. However, he was transferred, and the new manager said that, if I left to play football, he would not hire me back. I was so angry that the last day before I quit, I tore apart the back pop bottle room and walked out. When football season was over, I went back to see if he had changed his mind. He said that, if I had not wrecked the pop bottle room, he would have hired me back. My explosive temper cost me a good-paying job.

Busted Up School Dance...

When in high school, I would get drunk with my friends. We thought we were invincible and impressive when we would go around crashing parties and starting fights with other guys. Sometimes, we would drink just to have the illusion of courage to ask girls out.

Once, a friend and I got drunk and snuck into a high school dance at a rival school. We chased people all over the dance floor, challenging anyone who was brave enough to fight, but no one would accept. We caused a huge, disruptive scene, all for our own destructive egos. This was all in an attempt to impress the girls with our strength, then we would get out of there before the police were called. I jumped on the back of my huge accomplice and wrapped my arms around him to restrain him from fighting. It is hard to believe now, but we actually thought such behavior showed strength. In reality, however, it was weakness.

Not long thereafter, a few acquaintances from a neighboring high school and I made Molotov cocktails and torched another neighboring school's bonfire the night before a big rally for their football team. Those posted to guard the unlit bonfire chased us through the woods but never caught us.

Stranded at Pittsburgh Civic Arena

On February 6, 1970, during my senior year in high school, I got a ride with a classmate to a Three Dog Night concert at the Pittsburgh Civic Arena. He warned me that he could not take me home because he was bringing someone else back, and the car would be packed. Either I did not believe that he would really leave me there, or I only cared about getting to the concert and was not concerned about how to get home.

Following the exciting concert, he reminded me that he had no room in the car for me. Everyone was leaving the concert, and I could not find anyone to give me a ride home. I realized I was stranded in Pittsburgh with no way home and no way to call my parents. It was too late and too cold to hitchhike. With hope dimming, some adults from my area recognized my bewilderment and asked what I was doing. I explained my situation, and they said they would try to fit me on the chartered bus they came down on with other people. I was most relieved to get home, but could not remember those who helped me that late night in the middle of winter.

Stranded at Geneva-on-the-Lake

Occasionally, I hung around with Bob McElroy, who was a classmate. He worked at the Dinner Bell restaurant in downtown Sharon, and after closing late at night, he would make me any food item or milkshake I wanted before we went out riding around in his car.

On Saturday, July 4, 1970, less than a month after our high school graduation, Bob asked me to go with him for the day to Geneva-on-the-Lake in Ohio. It was a wild place with lots of bars, bikers, brawls and women. Bob and I soon got separated. I think he took off in his car with a girl he met and left me there. I was stranded—clueless regarding the routes to hitchhike 70 miles back to my house in Pennsylvania. So, I was facing the reality of a potentially dangerous night on my own.

While walking down the main street of Geneva-on-the-Lake as it was getting late in the day, I just happened to see Gary Deichler, a friend of my older brother Kenny. Gary was standing outside the Sunken Bar drinking. He was hanging around the bar, drinking lots of beer and “chasing women” when I ran into him. I told him of my dilemma. He said he and a buddy were staying in a back room near the Sunken Bar. Gary said I could sleep on the floor in their room that night, and he would take me home the next morning. I was glad to take him up on this offer, and although I was only 17 and underage, we drank beer all night. The

next day, he took me home.

Many years later, Gary told me that he remembers that incident well. He was recently honorably discharged from the Navy after serving on a submarine and had heard that Geneva-on-the-Lake was a wild place to be. The night I ran into him, he said he would buy a beer in the Sunken Bar and then go outside and drink it. Then, go back inside and buy another beer and do the same repeatedly. He said he was drunk when I came by.

I thanked him and told him that God unknowingly used him to help me that night because I had no idea what to do or where to go.

Ohio Gang



There was a gang of guys in nearby Ohio who had a reputation for jumping out of their car with clubs and chains and beating people up. We heard they were coming to Pennsylvania, and since I had my own reputation from lifting weights, some guys asked me if I would stand with them to help.

While I was at Buhl Park with about 15 guys, this car with six guys from Ohio showed up and jumped out of their car with clubs and chains. When the guys standing with me saw the clubs and chains, they all took off running and deserted me. There I was standing by myself. When they were about 20 feet away, I decided there was no way I had a chance, so I jumped into a nearby car with a girl I did not even know, locked her doors and told her to get out of there fast. She just happened to be from Ohio, but she drove me around trying to find some of my friends to help me fight these guys, as they chased us in their car. I could not find any of my friends. Eventually, we lost the guys from Ohio.

A few days later, while by myself in McDonald's, these guys saw me. I was only 16, and they were all older. They walked over to me, and I thought it was all over, but the biggest one said to me, "We respected the guts you had to stand up to us. We want you to join our gang." So, I did. They took me to one of their parties, but initially, the main drug provider did not want me there. The other guys convinced him I was safe, so he allowed me to stay.

We spent most of our time cruising in cars, partying, looking for someone to fight, something to break into or some trouble to get into. During the race riots in the summer of 1968, we rode through volatile neighborhoods, one time in a truck and another occasion in a convertible—with some bad characters—and a shotgun in the back seat. (Years later, I walked the same streets of Farrell as a chaplain with tracts in my pocket, telling people about how Jesus Christ changed my life.)

We went to a dance at the Bugout, a teen nightclub in Transfer, to get even with a gang from Greenville who beat up some guys at a West Hill bar. Only a few of them were there at the time, but after one of them made a quick call, we were greatly outnumbered. Known as Crazy George, the oldest guy in our gang told them he had a pistol in his boot which he had his hand on and told the leader (a huge guy who looked like a motorcycle gang member) that he would shoot him first if there was any trouble while we got out of there. (Years later, one of the guys in that gang became a faithful supporter of my ministry.)

The Sharpsville police pulled us over as three cruisers surrounded us, and the officers held shotguns on us. They thought we were from another gang. We hid the knives and clubs under the seats when we saw them, but they still took some of us in for curfew violation.

One of the gang's former associates squealed on some of the other guys in their gang by pointing them out to another gang that was after them. They got beat up. We later caught the informer at McDonald's, and the guys started hitting him while I kicked out his truck headlights.

Danny, one of the guys we hung around with, was later shot and killed while robbing a gas station. Another was sent to prison for drugs. Kevin and George were killed at a young age in car wrecks. Max, who was influenced by my martial arts skills to begin training, went on to become a 10th degree black belt and worked in law enforcement. He died at age 59. Jack served in the Marine Corps and died at age 66. I lost contact with Butch.

Karen



In junior high, I had gone steady with numerous girls, many of them at the same time. In fact, at one junior high dance, five of the girls I was supposedly going with were present. I would take them to a secluded stairway, one at a time. Word spread rapidly and before the dance was over all five caught me on a stairway and threw my rings at me.

I developed such a reputation that, by high school, few girls in my school would date me. That set the stage for my going with girls from other schools.

Karen Blair was a junior at Hickory High School; I was a senior at Sharon. One night, Karen was with some friends at a party at Stefanick's in Hickory Township when some buddies from the Ohio gang and I showed up uninvited. Karen and I had seen each other over the years at various dances and strongly disliked each other. However, that night we both had too much to drink, so I asked her to go for a walk with me outside. We sat in my friend's car in a parking lot across the street from the party. As I walked her back toward the house, I asked her to go out with me sometime. She agreed.

As my five buddies were leaving the party, one of them foolishly yelled out a racial slur. I am not certain why, as I had many friends from different ethnic backgrounds. The situation quickly turned volatile. I told Karen to leave so she went into the house. By then, dozens of angry guys surrounded us. It appeared we were going to be in a fight for our lives. When violence seemed imminent, the oldest guy in our gang apologized to the dominant person of those encircling our car. Somehow, they got onto the topic of the 101st Airborne Division. Since they both had served in the 101st at different times, that calmed the situation enough for us to get in the car to leave. They let us go, but not before someone smashed our front windshield with a cement block.

The Photo That Started It All

I never followed through on my promise to call Karen for a date. However, a few weeks later, someone told her there was a photo in Sharon High School's yearbook of her selling tickets at the Columbia Theatre to Sharon's senior class vice president and his date. Wanting to see the photo, Karen's mother brought her to my house because both of our sisters were in Debulets together. (In fact, I had spent the night at her house when I was in sixth grade and she was in fifth grade, while our sisters and mothers were with the Debulets in New York where they won the national title for baton twirling. We stayed in the same room in separate twin beds.)

Karen looked really pretty that night, so after she saw her photo, I said, "Hey, I asked you out at that party. Do you still want to go?" "Sure," she replied, and so began our romance.

Other Girlfriends

At this point in my life, I had many girls after me (mostly from other schools by this time) and was involved with quite a few. I was able to get almost any girl, but one girl really impressed me. However, after dropping her off, I would stay out until all hours of the night. Eventually, Karen played detective and found out everything I did. Oftentimes, my friends informed on me since some of them wanted to date her. She made me call all my girlfriends and break it off while she listened on the other extension.

Karen and I became inseparable, always going somewhere or doing something together. She did not give me much time to run around with my friends anymore. She did not like most of them—especially the one who we found out had beaten up her father in a drunken fight.

My friends did not like me spending so much time with her and often tried to break us up. Her friends did not like how I treated her, and they always tried to get her to break up with me. Somehow, our relationship continued.

Guy Hit Karen

At a party that I did not attend, Karen's supposed friend, Michelle, told a guy there to smack Karen, so he did. When I found out, I went straight to his house that night and knocked on his door. I was going to hit him closed fist, but he was so scared that I opened my fist at the last instant and hit him openhanded. He ran back into the house and fainted on the floor. His mother came out yelling at me, but when I told her what her son had done, she agreed he deserved it.

Whenever anyone said or did anything to Karen, all she had to do was tell me, and I would end up in a fight. Karen often had me fighting someone over something.

Pallet Plant and Health Spa

I finally got a job after graduation at Johnson Industries, a pallet manufacturing plant in Orangeville, Ohio. However, working on an assembly line was boring and not how I wanted to spend my life. After a week, I quit.

While I was working at the pallet company, Karen saw an ad in the paper for an instructor at a new health spa—the first of its kind—opening in our area. That sounded too good to be true, so I applied. While many older and more experienced people applied, the owners from California liked my physique and attitude the best, so they hired me. I was only 18 when I got the health spa job. I loved being paid for something I enjoyed so much and did anyway. It was a dream come true. Now, all my dedication to lifting was finally paying off.

Sadie Hawkins Dance

Karen asked me to the Sadie Hawkins dance at Hickory High School. The owner of the health spa, Maxine, gave me permission to go. However, that Friday night, I had several unexpected and new potential customers. I was taking them through a sample workout when Karen arrived for me to take her to the dance. Maxine said, “You cannot leave now, or I will fire you.” I walked out and left the clients with her.

I got drunk before the dance and when a teacher tried to stop me from entering the dance, I threatened to beat him. Although much bigger than me, he let me in and never called the police, at least not before we decided to leave.

Maxine called me back and rehired me. I got fired and rehired a few more times before I became a Christian and quit for good.

Searching

It became clear to me why I was doing all this. I was searching for something, but I was not quite sure what it was or how to find it. At first, I thought it was about seeking happiness, excitement and thrills; perhaps acceptance and probably gaining power and control over myself and others. However, I soon realized that I was really searching for something far more meaningful—lasting fulfillment, purpose, peace and joy. Even so, my quest eluded me and led me down dead-end streets. Where and when would I find the answers to life?

Weightlifting and Karate



When I began lifting weights in seventh grade, I was often told to stop wasting my time because I was skinny and weak. The motivation that kept me going was my desire to become muscular like my older brother Kenny. I wanted to change my self-image and overcome my puny physique because I was tired of being pushed around. My goal was to be the strongest in my class by the time I graduated high school.

I made a makeshift weight room and a boxing ring in my garage. I built a wobbly bench and stand out of scrap wood to hold the weights. Sometimes, I had weightlifting partners, and sometimes I worked out alone. Through years of relentless training, my “weak guy” image was changing—my skinny body was developing muscles! I won money in the weightlifting room at the Buhl Club from those who bet that I could not do 10 dips with 75 pounds of weights on my legs. In high school gym class, I held the record for doing 27 pull-ups.

I never forgot the guys who gave me a hard time and bullied me. I had several guys on my list to get revenge for past incidents. As I became stronger, I went after them with a vengeance because of the hostility I had for them.

Being one of the youngest in my class—a year younger than many and two years younger than some—I had to learn to fight to survive. This challenge turned into an advantage because it made me strong and determined. Pound for pound, I achieved my goal. I only weighed 160 pounds and could bench press almost 300 pounds. Eventually, at age 18, I reached my benching maximum of 335 pounds, which back in 1971 was fantastic, especially since I only weighed 165 pounds. My appearance and image were my idols.

As a teen, I tried to impress people to gain attention. In short, I was a showoff. I lifted weights six days a week, three hours a day to develop a bigger and stronger body to arrogantly flaunt it to others—but in reality, it was to camouflage my feelings of insecurity.

I remember going to the beach with my weightlifting buddies where we would do pull-ups to pump ourselves up and then strut around. If anyone asked directions to the concession stand (which did not happen often, so we would ask the question to each other when significant people walked by), we would point the way with our arms flexed so that our bicep muscles would bulge, foolishly thinking we were impressing people. I would also do backflips in the sand to get attention.

Karate Involvement

Shortly after graduation, at age 17, I began martial arts training and was attempting to develop the power of ki and chi (inner energy/ life force). I got into karate because I learned that strength alone is not enough to win every fight. My main motivation for getting into karate was to increase my fighting ability and to get more revenge.

When I started with karate, I was told, “You will never be any good at karate, Rudge. You’re too muscle-bound from lifting weights. You’re too tight. You have no control.” They were right. I purposely had no control when sparring.

My instructor really liked my aggressiveness and animalistic sparring and often used me as an *uke* (in Japanese martial arts, a *uke* is the person who “receives” a technique) to demonstrate on because I was able to withstand it. I had bruises on my chest and up and down my arms and legs from my instructor demonstrating hands and feet techniques on me as well as from sparring. I greatly respected my instructor and did virtually everything he said.

When he said, “Step forward. I want to use you for an *uke* to demonstrate strikes and kicks,” I did so. When I was told, “Lay down and put this potato on your chest so I can slice it in half with this sword,” I obeyed. When he said, “Spar and fight,” I sparred and fought!

After taking karate for only six months, I was in a tournament in Cleveland. I was competing against a guy who was much bigger and had taken karate for two years. After he scored the first point (with a side kick), I went wild, grabbed his kicking leg and threw him down twice to impress Karen. I tied the score with a forefist strike to his ribs. Eventually, I lost a close match as I punched him and he kicked me simultaneously, but I shook him up and won his respect.

By the second year of karate, however, my instructor, who later became a four-time world champion and a world record holder for breaking a block of ice, was calling me “Godzilla” because of my sparring ability and because I was the strongest and craziest of his students. Many times, before class, I would go into the weight room and pump some iron. Inadvertently, my muscles would be tight,

so I had little control when punching. I was ferocious when fighting an opponent. I loved to hurt people.

I remember as a green belt sparring Steve, a higher ranked purple belt, called "the man-eater of Sharon." I had a famous and fast reverse punch with which I caved in three of his ribs. Years later, some girls asked him if he knew Bill Rudge. He took off his shirt and showed an indentation in his rib cage and laughingly said, "Yeah! I know him!"

Another time, while still a green belt, I was working out with a second-degree black belt in preparation for a demonstration. He needed someone who could take his abuse, so my instructor chose me to be his uke and spar with him. After working me over during the *wazas* (grappling and striking techniques), he tore my *gi* (karate uniform) apart during the sparring, so I grabbed his *gi* and he tore back, ripping three of my fingernails back on my right hand. Blood was gushing out, so I started to leave to go and wash off my hand, but my instructor said, "I didn't dismiss you yet, keep fighting!" So, I slapped my hand down across my leg popping my fingernails back into place and I continued sparring until dismissed.

During the actual demonstration, he put a potato on my chest. It rolled off the first time, and Karen was sure I was going to be cut in half and die. But the second time, he hit it perfectly with his samurai sword. Although it appeared not to be cut in half, as I went to get up, both halves rolled off my chest.

As my new wife, Karen soon would not tolerate my karate training anymore and cut my *gi* apart with scissors. I was so angry, I made her sew it back together. After obtaining my goal of a black belt, the Lord led me out from training under various instructors and at several different dojos.

Marines or Army Rangers



In June 1970, I was seventeen and just out of high school. I planned to enlist in the Marine Corps with a few buddies and go to Vietnam. We went on a military bus to Pittsburgh for the physical exam. We all passed and were to return in a week to be sworn in. My buddies went, but I never did.

About the same time, my older brother Kenny who was a Test Officer and Second Lieutenant in the Army at Fort Benning (right before being promoted and deployed to Korea as Compound Commander of a recreation center), told me to go into the Army and join the Rangers if I wanted really tough training. This way, I would have the adventure I wanted with better opportunities for a future career. All I had to do was sign on the dotted line—but there was this girl.

Karen and I were getting serious in our relationship, and Karen begged me not to enlist and leave her, so I agreed to wait. Also, for me, Karen gave up her dream of becoming an airline stewardess upon high school graduation. Besides, I knew I probably would have been killed or maimed in Vietnam because of how foolhardy I was.

Train Hopping South



Having laid in my bed many nights listening to the sound of train whistles, I was enchanted with images of hobos and freedom. It created a desire in me to go down south. In August 1970, a classmate, Bob McElroy, decided to go with me on a trip. I was working at Hicks Stationery and Office Equipment, cleaning typewriters that summer shortly after high school graduation. I did not give much notice to my boss, Clarence. When I asked if my job would be available when I returned, he said, "Maybe."

We packed our duffel bags and headed to the train tracks in downtown Sharon to catch a southbound train. A slow-moving freight train came by with the doors of a boxcar open. We ran alongside the train as we threw our bags in, then one at a time, jumped toward the open door, landing on our chests halfway in and crawling the rest of the way inside the boxcar. We thought the train would take us a lot farther than it did. We ended up in the Youngstown, Ohio, train yard. The train would go forward and then back up as it hooked up additional cars. After a few hours of this back and forth, we decided trains might not be the way to travel.

We started walking out of the train yard when Youngstown police picked us up. Once they were finally convinced that we were not two escapees from a detention center in New Castle, Pennsylvania, they advised us that the best way to travel is to hitchhike. They gave us a ride to the interstate and dropped us off. Bob taught me how to read road maps on this trip.

In West Virginia, two guys picked us up and invited us to the Hare Krishna commune. We willingly accepted to get a free meal. Their lifestyle seemed very bland and boring to two 17- year-old guys like us who were looking for adventure and excitement.

We were hitchhiking through the mountains of West Virginia as dusk was

settling in. A carload of four guys stopped and told us to get in. Sizing up the situation, we felt it was not safe, so we passed up the offer and kept walking. The next day, we were picked up by two young men. They drove us through the mountain roads and side roads. We looked at each other in the back seat and whispered, "They are going to take us somewhere secluded and shoot us."

Finally, we came to a clearing and saw a house. They pulled in and their mother came out to greet them. They told her they had some guests who were hungry, so she made us a delicious meal. I will never forget West Virginia's hospitality.

After eating, we left there and headed to Virginia. We were picked up by a young man returning to his Army base. The Virginia State Police pulled him over for speeding and took in all three of us. They informed us that none of us could leave until the \$25 fine was paid. The driver did not have \$25, so we were stranded. Finally, my friend and I took the little money we had and helped pay the fine, so we could continue our trip.

While walking through a city in Virginia, a local police officer called to us. I responded, "Yeah." He became irate and yelled, "Don't you 'yeah' me, boy, or I'll put you in jail!" I said, "Yes, sir!"

We were enjoying the Southern culture and scenery as we headed from Virginia to North Carolina. Bob wanted to continue to Florida, but I said I was going to try and make my way back to Pennsylvania. He changed his mind, and we both headed back north. We jumped onto a train in Fayetteville. We sat in the open air on new tractors that were being transported and rode that way for a couple of hundred miles, smoking cigars and watching people working in the cotton and tobacco fields.

We spent a few days at Virginia Beach where we unexpectedly met some girls who graduated from our school a year before us. We then headed for Washington, D.C. We were picked up by two guys about our age who drove us around D.C. for a while. We saw a woman running down the road screaming for help. We stopped and picked her up. She was a prostitute who was just beaten up by a client who did not want to pay. He hit her in the face with a lamp in the motel room, so we drove her to safety.

A little later, the Washington police pulled up beside us at a red light and asked, "Did you boys steal that car?" The guys in the front shook their heads from side to side as they said, "No!" We all laughed as soon as the police pulled away for continually harassing us for no reason. A few minutes later, the guys who picked us up informed us that they had just stolen the car right before picking us up.

After a few more days of hitchhiking and many more adventures, we finally arrived back home in Pennsylvania. When I got home, I discovered that Hicks Stationery and Office Equipment had hired a new person to replace me. Years later, my former boss, Clarence, would be in a church where I was speaking. He and that church have been faithful supporters ever since.

Out of Control



As a teenager, I worked out obsessively and fanatically, but my lifestyle was not nearly as disciplined. I fought, drank, stole and vandalized, yet many believed I was the epitome of strength.

I compromised and conformed to the standards of those around me because I did not have the courage to resist peer pressure. I was too weak and afraid to say, “No!” And too insecure to tolerate being called “Chicken!” I had physical strength, but I did not have the inner strength and courage, nor strength of character needed to resist peer pressure. I was out of control in practically every area of my life.

Stealing Addiction

I could not control my stealing. I stole many things from many places. I would walk into a store and walk out with almost anything I wanted. I carried weights out of the Buhl Club in my gym bag. I stole money from the coat room at the Sacred Heart Bazaar and from the homes of people I considered rich. I stole so much that it became second nature. I would steal without hesitation and sometimes without even realizing I was doing it.

Junk Food Addiction

Eating was another area in which I was out of control. As a kid, I was a junk food addict! I would steal money from my dad and oldest brother to buy candy and milkshakes. I craved chocolate, sugar, salt and greasy foods. One time, I stole \$20 (that was a large sum of money when I was about 7 or 8) from my oldest brother and took a neighbor girl to a nearby convenience store. I bought us milkshakes, candy bars and other items. When I paid with a \$20 bill, they called my house.

My oldest brother came to get me and smacked me all the way home for stealing from him.

When my friends and I became teens, we frequently slept out under the stars. We would load up on junk food to eat throughout the night. Usually, I would buy a couple of quarts of soda or a half gallon of chocolate milk, along with cupcakes, donuts, candy bars and potato chips. My friend's girlfriend worked at a candy store, and on Sunday afternoons, she would be working alone, so we came in and ate anything we wanted, taking bags of candy home. As a result, I had several teeth pulled and many fillings due to all the sugar-laden foods I had consumed.

At Pete's homemade candy store in downtown Sharon, my friends and I would steal all kinds of candy and fudge. Pete was hard of hearing, so when he was in the back making candy, we would pilfer the store. Then, when he came out, we would buy about ten cents worth of candy and leave.

Drinking Addiction

Drinking was also a problem for me. I could not control my use of alcohol. I lived to get high on weekends and holidays. On many occasions, I was in car wrecks due to the influence of alcohol, barely avoiding tragedy.

Gambling Addiction

I loved gambling so much that it had begun to control me. For weeks at a time, my friends and I would go on gambling sprees, during which all our free time would revolve around gambling. We would play cards all night and even developed an intricate cheating system by using our eyes. This system won us lots of money, but, eventually, it almost got us killed. Once, at a local bazaar, I convinced the dealer in a poker booth to give me extra cards with the promise of splitting the profits with him afterward. He did, but I took off and never gave him anything. I also learned a special card trick that won me many bets.

Lying Lips

My mouth was also out of control and always getting me into trouble. I could not restrain my lying lips. I lied so well, I convinced myself. When I was not lying, my big mouth was popping off to someone. Often, older guys waited for me after school, came to my house, were looking for me or sending someone else after me because of something offensive I said to them or something obnoxious I said or did to their girlfriends. Impatience, anger and my quick temper led to many verbal and physical fights.

Never around my parents or family, but amongst my friends, my mouth was filled with swearing and cursing.

Cheater and Charmer

My cheating was uncontrollable. I cheated or charmed my way through much of high school and thought I got away with it. Answers would be written up and down my arms, hidden under my desk, on my belt and in my socks. I would sweet-talk girls to do assignments for me and pay or threaten guys to do them. Guess what? The only one I cheated was myself!

I expected to spend my life lifting weights and loafing on some secluded island beach somewhere, reclining in a hammock tied between two palm trees. You could not have convinced me back then that one day I would need what was being taught in high school.

The only areas in which I really applied myself were physical education (gym class) and lunch. I only passed two years of Spanish and two years of algebra and geometry because both of the teachers were young women, and I was flirtatious.

Controlled by lust, I compulsively looked for constant excitement and pleasure. Consequences were of little concern—at least until they caught up with me! A true hedonist, I used and abused many people.

Switching Friends

I had a history of switching friends the same way I changed girls and jobs. Frequently! I had no integrity and serious commitment issues. After a few months, sometimes only weeks or days, I either got bored or accomplished my goal and moved on to new friends and neighborhoods. Usually, I disappeared because of disinterest or to pursue something or someone more exciting. I would often rotate through several groups I befriended in different neighborhoods on different days of the same week.

As well as longtime childhood friends from the West Hill, it was quite easy for me to make friends and start hanging out with any group that interested me at the time or had something to offer that I wanted. I would usually befriend someone in the group who would invite me to join them, or I would just walk to their neighborhood and start hanging out with them. I would show up at their houses or hangout places, then often walk home in the dark. I am not certain how or why I was so easily accepted into each group, but somehow I was. Each group had its own personality and emphasis.

Many of the groups I pursued were into a sport I liked to play at the time. Some focused on baseball in vacant lots, others on basketball at various outdoor basketball courts and others played football on the street or at various fields in their neighborhoods. Some were into exploring, hiking and outdoor adventures. Others were into drinking in their “hideout” or partying which was an attraction to me but soon lost its appeal. Another group was into playing in a band and growing long hair. That did not last long. Then, there were the guys I hung out with while on the high school football team. Two different groups I spent time

with loved to play cards and gamble. Several different individuals and groups I rotated back and forth with were into lifting weights and boxing at various places. Another set of friends was into karate and martial arts training. A few friends I hung with liked to go looking for fights or engage in mischief and vandalism. Some had cars and took me places or liked to travel with me.

There were also many people who came to my house for various activities—from playing in the field to exploring Perkins and the mansion to lifting weights and boxing to hanging out on my front porch or shack and, later on, in the upstairs apartment of my house that I acquired after my brother Kenny left to serve in Korea with the Army.

Throughout my youth, I hung around with dozens of different groups or individuals who were my age or older. The advantage was the diversity of experiences obtained; the disadvantage was not developing close and lasting friendships with very many of them. During my senior year of high school, lunch was a difficult time. When I walked into the cafeteria, I saw various groups of friends sitting together and laughing, but I was no longer close to any of them, so I often sat alone. I could have probably sat down with several groups, but by this time in high school, friendships were so defined and close for many that it was not worth the effort to me. Besides, I had already used or abused too many of the guys and girls to re-establish friendships.

Cruel and Foolish Things



I did a lot of cruel and foolish things as a teenager who was walking in rebellion. Some are known only to me and God. The following stories are sufficient to give you a glimpse of the depravity my defiance of God led to.

My friends and I were driving and drinking on a back road. I took a full can of beer, jumped out of the car, ran into someone's front yard and threw it right through a large window in the front of their house. All I was concerned about was watching the exploding glass, impressing my friends and getting away. It never entered my mind there might be a child and mother sitting on the other side who could be injured or scarred for life.

Another time, one of the girls we hung out with told me she thought she was pregnant and asked if I would karate kick her in the stomach to abort her baby. Once she convinced me she was serious, I kicked her hard enough in the gut to buckle her over in pain. I later found out she was not pregnant, but that shows the mentality I had developed.

I thrived on bumper-dragging cars in the snow, jumping trains and jumping off train trestles into the waters of the Shenango Dam even though I was afraid of heights. I forced myself to do it because of peer pressure and a desire for yet another thrill. Adventurous activities were a passion for me.

Thrills in Cars

I had a desire to do every crazy and dangerous thing imaginable. I was addicted to adrenaline and would try every conceivable thrill to give me a temporary high. It was nothing for me to get high and race down the highway at speeds of more than a hundred miles an hour. Once, I sped down the highway at 115 miles per hour in my dad's convertible (vibrating like it was going to fall apart) thinking I

was invincible and that if I hit something I would not be killed. The fastest I ever went was 135 miles per hour in my friend's Mustang. I loved the sensation of speed.

I remember well how alcohol and music affected my friends and me as teenagers. We used to start fights and act wild and crazy when drinking too much and when we heard certain songs. I wrecked several cars because a particular song on the radio motivated me to drive even faster and more recklessly than usual. I hitchhiked across the country, mainly because two popular songs of that time made it sound so exciting.

One time, it was snowing on our way home from a party in Sharpsville when my favorite song by The Doors came on. I told the driver, a classmate, Bruce, who recently got his driver's license, to go faster and faster and threatened to push his pedal to the floor if he did not do so. He was an inexperienced driver, so he did what I told him. I wanted him to get into an accident. Sure enough, we hit a parked car in Sharon on Sharpsville Avenue, then our car spun around and hit a telephone pole. All I did was cut my head on the mirror. Bruce was shaken up but not injured. That was the last time he ever gave me a ride.

A drunk driver was coming down the wrong side of Trout Island Road, a gravel road out by the dam. He was swerving all over the road. When he was still far away, I excitedly said, "He's going to hit us!" I was sitting up front, and I actually enjoyed watching him get closer and closer until he eventually hit us head-on. Once again, we walked away with only minor injuries.

When I finally had my own car, I was driving some friends up East State Street to the high school. I sped through a light that just turned red and hit the car of a prominent businessman crossing in front of us. He had a brand-new Cadillac he had just bought a week before. I had no insurance, so my buddies all stuck with me and told him that he ran a red light. He agreed for each of us to pay for our own damages. (Years later, he and his brother became supporters of my ministry.)

On remote and dark roads we would turn out our car lights so the car in front did not see us coming. Using their lights to see, we would get right up on their bumper without them realizing it, turn on our bright lights and start honking the horn. The people would usually freak out.

As a teenage driver, my challenge at night was to not have to stop for stop signs. While driving across Logan Avenue, I would turn off my headlights as I approached each stop sign. If I saw no other headlights coming up or down the other street, I proceeded. Several times, I was able to go all the way across Logan Avenue without stopping at even one stop sign. I always hoped someone coming the other direction was not doing the same thing that I was.

Dennis, my friend from church, had a long gravel road in the woods behind his house, so we would drive old cars down it as fast as they would go, running over small trees, sideswiping larger trees or crashing cars into each other.

During one trip, I told Dennis and another friend Dude that I was going to go full speed this time without using brakes and crash into the hill at the end of the road. They did not believe me, so, when I put the gas pedal to the floor and kept it down, going about 70 mph, they jumped into the back seat and held pillows over their heads. Once again, we walked away relatively unhurt.

“Angel” on the Freeway

I was driving home a little before midnight. It was raining, and I was going 70 mph down the freeway. I lost control, and the car began to spin. I was headed backward across the median strip into oncoming traffic when, suddenly, my car switched directions and slid backward into the guardrails on my side of the freeway, knocking down three of them. My rear fender was smashed in and was rubbing against my back tire, so I could not drive it. Not wanting to be picked up by the police, I pulled the fender out by hand and drove away.

I told my friends that it was weird how my car was heading across the median strip where I could have easily been hit by an oncoming car and killed. And then suddenly it was as though something threw me in the opposite direction. It did not make sense to me then, but it does now. I believe God intervened by assigning an angel to throw my car in the other direction and, once again, spare my life in my persistent foolishness.

Duality—Invincibility and Insecurity



I did not really acknowledge God, but through all the crazy things I attempted, He must have had His hand on my life. It is interesting that, even during my rebellion, I had a girl use cigarette ashes and a needle to put a tattoo of a cross and the word God on my forearm.

At times, I felt that I was invincible and that nothing could kill me. I even thought no one else really existed when they were not in my presence. What they did or said when they were not with me did not matter because they really did not exist. Somehow, they were only here for my pleasure.

That is why I was never jealous of my girlfriends. The only time she existed was when she was with me. However, Karen changed that philosophy very quickly because so many guys, even my friends, were after her. They would secretly tell her about me being out with other girls in hopes of getting her to go out with them.

Then at other times, I would go to the extreme opposite viewpoint and face the hard cold reality that I was not God and that I was fallible—especially after being injured in a car wreck or fight.

These conflicting feelings—at times, thinking I was a god and invincible and, at other times, being very insecure and having inferiority complexes—validated the Word of God without my ever knowing it. The rebellion, pride, self-centeredness, thinking I was a god and invincible was the same lie Satan offered Eve in Genesis 3:5: “For God knows that in the day you eat from it your eyes will be opened and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.” I was merely fulfilling the words of Jesus: “You are of your father the devil, and you want to

do the desires of your father. He was a murderer from the beginning and does not stand in the truth because there is no truth in him. Whenever he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own nature; for he is a liar and the father of lies" (John 8:44). The insecurity, inferiority complexes and phobias are a result of the fall of man and our separation from God because of sin and rebellion.

My Search

I tried everything imaginable in my quest for fulfillment—I had done and experienced virtually everything—but knew something was still missing in my life.

Karen Accepts Christ—The News that Shook My World



One day in January 1971, after dating regularly for about six months, Karen told me she was going to a concert. I said, "Fine. Go ahead and go." She thought it was going to be a rock concert, but it was a Christian concert that a friend invited her to at St. Joseph's Church during the Jesus Movement. When she got home at midnight she called to say, "Guess what, Bill? I became a Christian tonight!" I said, "That's fine, I am a Christian, too; I go to church once in a while." But she said, "No, this is different. I found Jesus in a real and personal way."

I thought it would pass, and we could still have fun together. But it didn't. In the weeks following, there was a tremendous change in Karen. She would not drink or party and all she talked about was Jesus Christ and the Bible. I wanted her attention and adoration and did not want competition from Jesus or have to share her with Him. I began to detest Jesus and would strategize while working at the health spa how to destroy her faith. One time, I took her out and pulled out her favorite bottle of wine, but she would not drink it.

If Karen would have compromised and conformed and allowed me to pull her back down, I probably would not be a Christian today. Doing so might have given us an immediate calm in our relationship because I harassed and persecuted her. I made it very hard for her. However, because she had the courage and strength to live for Christ—and although I would not admit it—I knew she had something real.

You will never win a boyfriend, girlfriend, husband or wife by compromising your convictions and commitment to Christ. All you will gain is a temporary peace but lose their respect for you and the Christ you serve. No matter how

much pressure you face, do not compromise, do not conform, but totally and unashamedly live for Jesus Christ. Eventually, you will impact the lives of others.

Guy Bongiovanni was the pastor at a church Karen was invited to attend as a teen. After she accepted the Lord, he baptized her. As Karen's boyfriend, I was not too happy about all these changes but was determined to check it out. I sat through a service, glaring at Pastor Guy the whole time, not quite able to figure it all out. However, Pastor Guy's strong faith and biblical insight caught my attention and respect.

One night at Farrell Christian Assembly, Karen was "baptized in the Holy Spirit" without her realizing what was happening. This experience freaked me out; the pastor knew that I was angry. When she and I would get into a heated argument, she would begin to pray in the Spirit. I would get so angry that I wanted to backhand her across the mouth to shut her up, but was afraid to do so because I was certain God would strike me if I did.

Smoke Screen

I had 101 excuses for not becoming a Christian. Mainly because I perceived it to be for weak sissies who needed a crutch and foolish people who believed in fairy tales. I thought Christianity was just plain boring and too restrictive—God wanted to ruin my fun. In my opinion, there was no evidence for Christianity, it was just blind faith.

Following an evening service I attended with Karen, I challenged Pastor Guy Bongiovanni with rapid-fire questions, "Prove that God exists. Give me evidence that evolution is not true. Explain where dinosaurs came from. Tell me why a supposed loving God allows suffering and evil and explain why Jesus Christ is so unique in comparison to all other religious leaders." I was surprised that he gave me some convincing explanations, but I was not ready to accept Christ at that time. My questions were merely excuses—a smoke screen to conceal my pride and bias and to absolve me from having to surrender my life to Jesus Christ. I wanted to continue in my delusion that I was god and continue to live my self-centered and pleasure-oriented lifestyle. Yet, Pastor Guy's words impacted me as the Holy Spirit began dealing with me in a powerful way.

Karen and her Christian friends constantly told me about Christ. I resented it and thought Christians were weirdos, yet I was not about to give Karen up for any religious nonsense. Part of me wanted to get away from Karen and her Jesus, but part of me could not be without her, which led to many arguments and breakups and then getting back together.

Her friends had mixed emotions about me as well. Sometimes, they strongly encouraged Karen to get away from me, and other times, they were either coming onto me or trying to get me converted. Knowing my reputation, they considered me a great challenge and knew that, if I could become a Christian, anybody could.

To appease Karen, I went with her to different churches and various venues of the growing Jesus Movement (barns, houses, fields and so on) so I would not lose her. Like many guys who went to religious services with girls they were attracted to, I had no interest in God at the time nor any intention of committing to Jesus Christ. I thought they were real weirdos, but I went and listened (at least some of the time). Without my realizing it, the Lord was beginning to get a hold of my life.

False Salvation Experiences

Karen and her friends would always try to persuade me to go down to the altar, but I usually resisted. One time, however, while at the Barn, her friends just about dragged me to the altar, so I prayed their prayer, “Oh, Jesus, come into my life.”

I did not really mean it though, and all I could think about, even while they prayed with me, was to get out and do my old things. I got off my knees and walked away unchanged. Within a couple of days, I was again turned off to Christianity. But now, I was justified in rejecting Christ. I had “tried” Jesus and could now say, “Your Christianity does not work! Your Jesus is a fake.”

Hitchhiking Out West



At the age of 18, I decided that whatever I was looking for had to be somewhere other than in Pennsylvania. I thought I would find what was missing in my life out West. Or maybe I was running from the God my girlfriend Karen kept telling me about. All I knew for sure was I had to get away.

In May 1971, a weightlifting buddy, Joe, and I hitchhiked west, hoping to pick up a “hot” (stolen) motorcycle in Albuquerque and ride it to California. As we left Sharon, I remember my parents trying to talk me out of the trip and Karen crying, but I was determined to go.

Karen’s Jesus was hindering my lifestyle! I liked to fight, steal, gamble and party; however, I rarely experimented with drugs or got drunk anymore because I considered that unhealthy and a hindrance to my weightlifting.

Having learned how to read maps from my southern trip the previous year, I determined our course. We hitched rides from all types of people; one was a businessman who picked us up near Akron, Ohio. Before I knew it, he was witnessing to me about Jesus! Now, I am running away from Sharon, Pennsylvania, and a religious fanatic girlfriend to escape from Jesus, and I run right into this religious nut who wears a suit and a tie and is telling me about Jesus! He knew from my reaction that I did not want to hear about this Jesus, so when he discovered I was going to New Mexico, he said, “I know some monks in New Mexico, and they will feed you.” He wrote a note, sealing it in an envelope with their address on it. Then, he said, “Give this envelope to the monks, and they will take care of you.” I stuck it in my duffel bag.

I thought, “I am never going to see some dumb religious monks,” but being curious, I opened the note to read it before I threw it away. It said, “These boys are deeply troubled. Please pray for their souls.” I decided to keep the note after all, just in case we needed to go there and get food.

In Columbus, we were picked up by a guy in his late teens or early twenties. He opened his glove compartment and pulled out a Bible. I thought, "Here we go again! I cannot get away from it!" But when he opened his Bible, there was a hole cut out of the center with a stash of marijuana hidden there. (Who would ever think of looking inside a Bible if the cops picked him up?) We thought that was really cool, so we all shared a joint together.

Continuing our way west, we were stranded in many cities, drenched from rain, caught in storms, had no money, were dirty and often hungry (unless we could steal some food or someone fed us), but we loved it. Everything we had was inside our duffel bags. In Oklahoma City, we were hit by a terrible storm. We put on our plastic ponchos and laid on an embankment to keep from being blown away. The winds were so strong—like a tornado—that we had to crawl into the back of a semi-truck.

You can imagine the things two teens might encounter on such a trip, and I think we experienced them all! After only two days and nights on the road and many adventures, we reached the hippie commune in Albuquerque, more than 1,600 miles from where we started in Sharon, Pennsylvania. Upon inquiring as to the whereabouts of my brother Larry they informed me he was not there. He had left the previous day to go swimming at some hot springs, somewhere in the mountains about a hundred miles away. No one there had any idea where he was or when he would be back (no such thing as cell phones then).

A few months earlier, my brother and I had spoken by phone. I told him I might come out to see him sometime. He said he could get me a "hot" motorcycle on which I could travel across the rest of the country to California. He did not believe I would ever come out, so he did not think to plan for my arrival. My dream to obtain a motorcycle and ride to California seemed shattered.

Miracle in Santa Fe

We decided to hitchhike to Santa Fe, more than 50 miles northeast of Albuquerque. After walking about three miles, we caught a ride that took us straight into Santa Fe. We heard on the car radio that the temperature that night would plunge to 25 degrees—a record low for that time of year. Anticipating warm weather out west in May, all I had was a short-sleeved shirt and a plastic poncho.

Our ride dropped us off in Santa Fe, and with darkness setting in, we wandered the cobblestone streets seeking a place to spend the night; it seemed the whole town had closed. Finally, we found an open bar but were turned away because we were underage. I asked if we could just go inside long enough to get out of the cold and find someone to put us up for the night. The person running the bar could not have cared less and assured me that, without proper ID, we were not allowed in.

A young teenage girl rode by on her bicycle—the only sign of life outside. We

yelled at her to stop, but she pedaled all the faster and disappeared down a side street before I could catch her. We returned to our only hope, the bar, now closing. No one leaving was willing to let us sleep on their floor for the night. It was getting later and colder as our hope faded, not knowing where to turn. Fear gripped our hearts as we faced the reality of a very cold night with no shelter.

Satan (whom I had served well the past few years) set me up to die, but God had other plans.

Suddenly, hope came alive again. Seemingly out of nowhere, down a narrow street came a small, yellow, foreign-made car with four long-haired hippies and a German Shepherd with their heads sticking out of the windows. We began to wave and yell, hoping they would stop. The driver started yelling, "That's my brother, that's my brother!" Rick, the hippie in the front seat said, "Larry, that is not your brother, we are brothers." Larry responded, "Yes, we are, Rick, but that is my blood brother." Rick responded, "That is impossible!" The car turned around and screeched to a halt in front of us.

Larry and three friends from the commune had hitchhiked up to Jemez Hot Springs (about 60 miles by road north of Albuquerque and 70-plus miles west of Santa Fe). After sleeping outside there for one night, the Park Rangers kicked them out of the Hot Springs early the next evening. Along with an abandoned German Shepherd Larry found, they were hitchhiking back to Albuquerque. Unable to get a ride, they decided to cross the road and begin hitchhiking toward Santa Fe because cars coming out of the mountains were getting scarce. To their surprise, a young female schoolteacher stopped and squeezed Larry, his buddies and the dog into her small car and took them to her house in Santa Fe. She let them sleep on her floor that night. The next morning she made breakfast for all of them, then said to Larry, "Please watch over my house. You guys aren't going to trash my house and steal my TV and other items?" Larry promised they would not.

This single female teacher left them a note stating she would be back at noon and that they were welcome to wait at her house. When she came home, she gave her keys to Larry, saying they could use the car to see Santa Fe for the rest of the day but to please bring it back that night, as it was the only car she had. She asked Larry, "You guys aren't going to steal my car and take everything in my house?" Again, Larry promised her they would not. Another teacher who had followed her home at noon drove her back to school and brought her home after work.

One of the guys suggested they steal her car and drive back to Albuquerque, but Larry wanted to keep his promise to return her car that night since she had been so nice. It was later that night as Larry was driving the teacher's car back to her house with his three friends and the dog that he saw me and my buddy on the street and saved our lives.

The defroster was not working, so the front windshield was fogged up with just a little spot for Larry to see out. My brother would have never recognized me

if the side windows were not down. We would have passed like two ships in the night. So why were the windows down in such cold weather? Because Larry found an abandoned German Shepherd he named Gonzo, and they had been feeding him Mexican beans all day; Gonzo had terrible gas. God used the dog's gas for those windows to be down. God uses the foolish things to confound the wise, and the weak things to confound the strong (1 Corinthians 1:27).

Somehow, some way, when he did not even know I was in New Mexico and when he was supposed to be a hundred miles away, my brother saved our lives. Even though I did not acknowledge Him then, a loving God had responded to our need. There in the small town of Santa Fe on a narrow side street, God, who in His infinite wisdom knew that one day I would give my life to Him, intervened and saved our lives.

We all scrunched into that small car and soon all six of us were hanging out of the windows. We drove to where my brother and his friends were staying. It never entered my mind that God had just saved my life as we all smoked some marijuana and talked about how unbelievable tonight's events were.

That night, Larry explained that he would not be able to get us a motorcycle. The following day, greatly disappointed, my buddy and I headed back to Pennsylvania, while Larry, his buddies and the dog hitchhiked back to Albuquerque. None of us would ever see that teacher again. I often wondered why she picked up four guys and a dog by herself and let them stay in her house and borrow her car. Why did they not steal the car and take off? I cannot remember that young teacher's name, but I will never forget what she did for us.

Over the years, Larry was in and out of prison for drug-related charges; he told many prisoners about that miracle in Santa Fe. In his 70s and dying of lung cancer, Larry recommitted his life to Jesus Christ. On fire for Jesus until his final day, Larry praised God for the amazing miracle that happened in Santa Fe in 1971. Although Larry was not able to save the life of our younger brother Jeffrey years earlier, God used him to save my life.

Several years before Larry passed away, he recorded on tape his memories from that never-to-be-forgotten day in Santa Fe:

We had this car and were out riding around Santa Fe. That day was horrible outside. It was cold. It was raining. It was sleet, half snow. And I saw this guy hitchhiking, he looked wet and cold and like he was on his last legs. He was in bad shape. I recognized him immediately. We didn't have much room in the small car, but we turned around and picked Bill and his buddy up. The young schoolteacher welcomed them into her home with open arms. Things like this don't usually happen, and in my opinion, it was the Holy Spirit that directed her to trust me. There were just so many things that ended up in me saving my brother's life, and the Lord was involved completely in this and just gonna give Him the praise and the glory. Bill never did get his motorcycle for which he came to New Mexico, but he found Jesus on the way. All these years that went by and

Bill's never given up on what he found. That's the best testimony in the world, and I love him.

Monks in New Mexico

Although it was out of the way, we decided to visit the Benedictine Monks, hoping to get some food. I gave them the envelope given to me in Akron; they fed us well and prayed for us. Before leaving, the monks gave us some literature, including a tract titled "The New Birth" and another on the Spirit-filled life. Sitting along the highway trying to get a ride, I had nothing better to do, so I read the literature. "The New Birth" explained what it meant to be a Christian. It was interesting, and for the first time, Christianity made sense but neither of us was ready. Besides, I thought, "This is pretty good, God. I go to visit Your monks and then get stranded here in the New Mexican desert without water."

Failing to catch a ride, we climbed a fence and crossed a short section of land with dense shrubs to get to another highway. Our legs were cut up from cacti, and we were very thirsty. The few cars that came by would not stop. It was hot, and, in desperation, we threw rocks at cars that passed by, hoping they would get mad and stop.

Finally, a man in a pickup truck stopped and gave us a ride into a small city. As we were trying to hitch a ride out of this city, the local police picked us up and said if we hitchhiked anymore, they would put us in jail. Having no money for a bus, I used a stolen credit card to call Karen. She cried over the phone as I shared our dilemma. (I did not realize that her father would eventually get the bill for all of the calls made to Karen on stolen credit cards.)

My new strategy was to stay at this restaurant with a gas station and ask the people who came in for a ride. It worked, as a semi-trailer truck driver got us out of that city.

Back to Pennsylvania and Karen

We had many more adventures along the way but were very happy to be back home. The first thing I did was call Karen and went over to see her. Her response after our reunion was, "Bill, why don't you come with me tonight? There is going to be a fantastic evangelist speaking in Youngstown, Ohio."

The last thing I wanted to do was spend my first night home in a church hearing about Jesus. "Karen," I told her in no uncertain terms, "you can take your religion and shove it!" "But Bill," she pleaded, "this guy is really good!" I wanted nothing to do with her Jesus, but she looked so beautiful that I finally agreed to go.

I Did Not Need God

I was eighteen and everything seemed to be going great. I was young, popular and respected. Finally, I was accepted by the older gang I so idolized. I had a beautiful girlfriend and a dream job as a weightlifting instructor. Wealthy businessmen would see me out and about and proudly say to their wives, "Hey, there's my fitness instructor." I was planning on getting into some power and physique contests. I was also excelling at karate—gaining notoriety as "Godzilla"—and was planning to go on the tournament circuit.

My life was not messed up. I was not sick or dying. I was not hooked on drugs or alcohol. I thought I had it all together and did not want God messing with my life. The last thing I wanted to do was to give my life to Jesus Christ.

If you could have convinced me that atheism was true and there is no God. If you could have persuaded me that God is just an impersonal energy force. If you could have proven that it's not Jesus—it's Buddha or Krishna or anyone other than Jesus. If you could have shown me the superiority of occultism, New Age spirituality or Eastern mysticism, I would have been overjoyed. No one would have been happier than me to discover the Bible was not God's Word and Jesus Christ was not whom He claimed to be—the promised Messiah, God incarnate and the only way of salvation. Then I could have continued in my delusion that I was god and remained lord of my self-centered, pleasure-oriented lifestyle.

Yet, the change in Karen and the things she was saying were affecting me. God was (unknowingly to me) drawing my heart to Him. I knew deep down something was missing in my life; I just did not know what it was. I thought I would find what would satisfy me in some other part of the country. Yet, after hitchhiking across the country, my search to find what was missing was still unfulfilled.

The Taming of “Godzilla”



At church with Karen my first night back from hitchhiking out West, I expected to hear the usual pitch about Jesus Christ. I sat there and watched the stupid Christians walk down the aisle and pray. Who would ever want or enjoy that kind of lifestyle? Surely not I; that was only for the weak and the foolish—not for me.

But that Sunday night, May 23, 1971, at Calvary Temple in Youngstown, Ohio, was different. The Holy Spirit was dealing with me in a way I had never known before. The evangelist spoke about Bible prophecy and how we could know God in a real and personal way. I had been searching for meaning and purpose in my life for 18 years. How well I knew the futility of looking to alcohol, drugs, sex or anything else for lasting happiness and peace. I had tried to change my self-image through lifting weights and karate. I knew that no self-development program or patterning my life after anyone else could change or fulfill me.

Suddenly, I realized the ultimate truth and reality of Jesus Christ. The words seemed to pierce my very heart and revealed to me that, truly, this is what I had always been searching for—to be restored to the God who created me. When the evangelist gave the altar call, Karen and her friends asked the usual question, “Do you want us to walk down with you?” I said, “No. This time, I’ll do it alone.” Instead of being begged or dragged as many tried in the past, I willingly stood and made the long walk down to the altar. On the way, I said, “God, if You prove Yourself real to me, I will live my life for You.” If not, I knew I would never want to hear His name again.

I got down on my knees and was totally sincere with God for the first time in my life and said, “Lord, I am sorry for all my sins. I believe that Jesus Christ is Your Son and that He died on the cross for me. I want to give my life to You.”

Please forgive me.”

I am not an emotional person and had not cried since my seven-year-old brother was killed, but for 15 minutes, I lay there and cried. I was remorseful for the horrible wrongs I had done and the people I had hurt. Many of the things forgiven at that time are known only to the Lord and myself, and according to His Word, He has not only forgiven but also forgotten. Those tears were the greatest cleansing I ever had—the night my life was dramatically and forever changed!

The following night at a service in Sharpsville, Pennsylvania, that same evangelist pointed to me and said, “Young man, last night there was a battle between heaven and hell. Hell wanted to keep you, but God won.”

Sitting in Circle at Karate Class

The next week, I went back to my old karate class with an instructor I respected very much. He always liked me for my determination and animalistic sparring. They called me “Godzilla” because of my strength from weightlifting and my purposeful lack of control when sparring with an opponent. The instructor remembered the times I hit or kicked a little too hard, and the time I caved in the rib cage of a higher-ranked student. He knew of my innate desire to hurt others and my strong desire to be the best. Whenever he needed someone to beat on or demonstrate with, I was often chosen because of my ability to withstand it. But now, when I sparred, I was no longer trying to hurt anyone.

One night, he looked around the class as we sat in a circle and said to each of us, “I know you; I have been with you for two years now, and I know what you think and what you will do.” However, when he came to me, he said, “Bill, you are different. I do not know you anymore; you have changed.” He was right. “If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new” (2 Corinthians 5:17 NKJV).

Jesus Christ changed my life; I was a new person in Him. When I sincerely asked Him, He did instantly what no one or anything else ever did or could have done. Although I was not perfect, I began to grow. Through Him, I found meaning and purpose. Only through Christ could I begin to conquer all the problems I had throughout my life and especially my teen years. Through Him, I have found that all things are possible. He truly is the Ultimate and Only Truth.

Before accepting Christ, I was popular and highly regarded in the karate dojo, as well as among my weightlifting peers and the friends I used to run with. Now, instead of going out drinking with them after class, I would tell them about Jesus. Some listened, but most distanced themselves from me and my newfound faith. A few tried to tempt me by holding a beer in front of me or by using other enticements. I went from being respected to being rejected. Nevertheless, what I found in Christ was worth more to me than anything I might lose.

Not a Passing Fad

My friends and acquaintances could not believe the change. Those who had been concerned about my life's tragic direction did not want me to go so far as Jesus. Some thought it was a passing fad, while others thought I was using Christianity as another scam. Some respected me for having the courage to live for Jesus Christ, especially since I had previously mocked and ridiculed Christians. Many came to me alone or in small groups to talk about what happened to me. Several admitted they wished they had the guts to accept Christ, while some eventually did.

My former boss at Hicks Stationery and Office Equipment, Clarence, told me several years later after I spoke at the church he attended that the mother of my close friend Jeff, and the sister of the owner of Hicks, said to him shortly after my conversion, "God's really got a hold of Bill's life." And she was so right.

Prayer: Better than Analysis or Strategy

If you had attempted to analyze me, you could not have figured me out because, at that time, I did not understand myself. If you had tried to strategize ways to reach me, they would have failed. However, if you had prayed persistently for God to do what only He could accomplish by His Spirit, you may have had a part in my eyes being opened.

Six years after becoming a Christian, I shared my testimony at Farrell Christian Assembly. Following the service, John Apa said to me, "I remember seeing an article in the newspaper about the mansion vandalism. I could imagine the heartache the parents went through, so I prayed for the salvation of the youth involved." Never give up praying for loved ones and friends, even though it seems they will never come to Christ. Somehow, someway, God will honor your prayers of perseverance.

Maybe God moved in my life in such a powerful way in response to the prayers of many others, as well as to honor the spiritual legacy of my ancestors. Years after my conversion, in my parents' attic, I found a large, framed graduation certificate from Moody Bible Institute dated December 17, 1914. On it was the name of my mother's father, John Christ Bombeck. I am certain (even though he died before I was born), that he and Aurie, his wife and my grandmother (and other godly relatives), had some influence with God that resulted in my wife and I, then our entire family, coming to salvation.

I Could Not Change Myself

I had attempted to change myself several times as a youth. I attempted to keep the Ten Commandments and tried to stop drinking, stealing, lying and swearing. I even endeavored to mimic and pattern my life after those who impressed and inspired me. Yet, all my efforts for lasting change and fulfillment proved futile.

No self-effort; no mental powers or latent energy in the universe; no hypnosis or meditation; no lifting weights or martial arts; no Eastern mysticism, occultism, atheism or innate human potential could give me the hope, peace and joy I craved. Nothing, and no one, could change my life—except the God who created me. My life was dramatically changed through a personal encounter with the resurrected Christ. I came to know Him as my Savior and Lord—not because I needed a crutch, but because of the compelling evidence I could not deny.

God's Transformation

Since the day I committed my life to Jesus Christ, God has proven Himself real to me. I have never looked back except to remember what I was, where He brought me from and what He has done in my life. Jesus Christ transformed my life and God took a person who was:

- Totally committed to weightlifting and karate and made him totally committed to Jesus Christ
- A victim of peer pressure and gave him the courage to stand alone, even in dangerous situations
- Out of control in almost every area of his life but brought every aspect of his life under His control
- Rebellious and stiff-necked but taught him to be surrendered and sensitive to God's Word and Spirit
- A liar, cheat and thief but enabled him to live a life of integrity
- A proud and arrogant person and taught him to walk in humility and meekness before the Lord
- Continually quitting jobs, switching friends and girlfriends, and gave him unwavering determination and commitment to ministry and marriage
- Centered on self and pleasure (even to the point of believing himself to be god) and taught him instead the meaning of self-sacrifice and gave him the desire to know and please his Creator more than anything else
- Known as “Godzilla”—one of the hardest hitters in the karate dojo—to being known as one of the hardest-hitting speakers
- Hitchhiking across the country in rebellion against God to traveling throughout the U.S. and around the world proclaiming Him
- A skeptical, smart-mouthed, streetwise kid and convinced him of His reality, Who has done the impossible through his life and ministry and Who has given him a passion to proclaim the truth and faithfulness of Jesus Christ

- Voted least likely to succeed and without potential to direct a growing international ministry, challenging believers to reach their maximum potential in Christ.

Foolish and Weak or Wise and Strong

My friends used to tell me that being a Christian was foolish, weak and boring. Now, I know that's a lie. The wisest and most courageous decision I ever made—that required more inner strength than anything else I ever did—was to surrender my life to Jesus Christ! I have lived the other lifestyles, and I assure you that it takes far more bravery and grit to completely live for the Lord.

It was easy to run with gangs, steal, fight and vandalize—anybody can do that. But it takes God-given courage and strength to totally live for the Lord. Living wholeheartedly for Jesus Christ has proven to be the most exciting, adventurous, challenging and fulfilling lifestyle I could have ever imagined.

Two of my Life Verses are:

The fear [reverence] of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding (Proverbs 9:10).

I can do all things through Him [Christ] who strengthens me (Philippians 4:13).

Friends From My Past

My friends thought I was crazy for becoming a Christian. Except for those who changed their lives before it was too late, all of them eventually suffered disastrous consequences of their foolish lifestyles. You decide who was wise and who was foolish. Some of them were killed in car crashes or tragic accidents while high on drugs or under the influence of alcohol. Some went to prison for dealing or using drugs or for committing acts of violence while under the influence of drugs or alcohol. Several became alcoholics and drug addicts. One was shot and killed while robbing a gas station and another was murdered. Several became victims of injuries, poor health and premature aging due to abusive behavior. Many had dysfunctional marriages and families with broken dreams and no meaning or purpose in life. Some even despaired of living to the point of committing suicide. As Psalm 37:1-2 advises us, “Do not fret because of evildoers, be not envious toward wrongdoers. For they will wither quickly like the grass and fade like the green herb.”

Throughout the years, many friends of my youth have contacted me when they were nearing death, or their wives have called to inform me that my friends were dying, to ask me to visit them at their houses or in the hospital. Through the influence of my testimony, several friends from the West Hill and the other areas I frequented have become Christians. Some became faithful supporters and volunteers for my ministry, and a few of them have gone into other types of ministry.

The world is passing away, and also its lusts; but the one who does the will of God lives forever (1 John 2:17).

Both Sides Of The Cross

Who I was and what I did before coming to Christ is in stark contrast to who I am and what I do since coming to know Him. My philosophy and lifestyle have dramatically changed to the point they are now diametrically opposite to what they were previously. Before the shadow of the cross passed over my life, my passions were rebellion, violence and pleasure. This side of the cross, my zeal is for obedience, compassion and reaching this world for Christ.

Some people thought I was hopeless as a teenager, but Jesus knew otherwise. I thank Him every day for His amazing grace to me, received many years ago when I was 18.

How has the cross affected you? What kind of a shadow (influence) has it cast on your life? Has the cross drawn you closer to God and the Savior, or are you still hiding, running from or rebelling against the LORD of all Creation? Do you realize that it's time for you to come home? Fall on your knees beneath the "shadow of the cross" and surrender your life to Jesus. Your eternity will be determined by your association with the cross.

Ran Away and Married



Karen and I found a new kind of love — a bond in Jesus that would cement our lives together in a way that cannot be explained. One week after giving my life to Jesus Christ, Karen came up with the idea to run away and get married. On Saturday morning (May 29, 1971), we drove to New Cumberland, West Virginia. I was 18, and she was 17. I showed my driver's license and Karen showed her birth certificate to verify our ages. Once the clerk at the courthouse verified our ages, she told us we needed to get blood tests and parental consent since we were underage (had to be 21). We also learned there was a three-day waiting period.

After getting our blood tests in West Virginia, we went back to Pennsylvania where we filled out the marriage application form. The notary, who was a neighbor of mine, said we needed to have at least one of each of our parents sign in his presence before he could notarize it. Knowing our parents would never consent, I told the notary that my mom was very sick at home in bed and unable to come to sign and that Karen's mother was also unable to do so. We forged our mothers' signatures and took the form back to the notary to be notarized.

The following Saturday, June 5, 1971, we returned to West Virginia with the appropriate paperwork, but we were informed by the courthouse clerk that we needed both sets of parents' signatures. I said, "Our parents just happen to be down the road at the racetrack, so we'll go get their signatures." I went to a nearby church and said, "Can I borrow your typewriter?" I typed in our fathers' names, and then we forged their signatures and returned the signed document to the clerk who said, "Okay, you can get married now."

I asked the clerk if she knew of a minister who would marry us, and she sent us to the nearby New Cumberland Christian Church where Rev. Allen S. Fields married us. The pastor's wife was the witness. Although we acted wrongly in this situation (and had to repent of it later and tell our parents about the forged

signatures), God used it to establish our future ministry together. A more in-depth account is found in my book *Reaching Your Maximum Potential in Christ*.

We planned to live in our own houses and have a wedding later. Karen was going to stay at her sister's house on our wedding night, and then, we could be together; however, her mother got mad at her father and stayed at her sister's, too. So, Karen stayed with her mother at her sister's house on our wedding night. The next day, Karen said, "I cannot live like this!" So we told her parents, and they wanted our marriage annulled. Her father did not like me because I did not wear socks or have a job. I said to Karen, "Maybe we should get our marriage annulled." She said, "If you do, you'll never see me again." I said to my dad as he sat on the back porch, "You raised five kids, what's one more?" Then, we moved into my parents' house. First, we used my bedroom and then the whole upstairs apartment after my sister and her husband moved out.

When we got married, I was only making \$10 a week from cutting Helen and Joe Perry's grass. At least I knew that Karen did not marry me for my money.

Karen convinced me to tithe on that \$10, and before long, we both had full-time jobs. I was hired at Pit Stop, owned by a client I formerly trained at the health spa, and Karen was hired at McDowell Bank, which would prove invaluable six years later when we started our own ministry.

Karen's High School Graduation Party and Florida Honeymoon

A couple days later, at her high school graduation party, Karen introduced me as her husband to her shocked family and friends. God does have a sense of humor. One of Karen's uncles was the police detective who despised me when he questioned me about the mansion incident. I do not know who was more surprised, him or me, but I was not the same person he remembered. Jesus had changed my life.

We used Karen's graduation money to go on a week-long honeymoon to Florida. I brought along two of my buddies in the back seat who wanted a ride to Tampa and who helped us with gas expenses. We all slept in the car along the way, as did Karen and I most of the time while in Florida, to save the cost of motel rooms.

Wanted to Be Drafted

I was still interested in military service, but again, Karen pleaded with me not to enlist. I agreed to wait and see if I was going to be drafted. One day, we sat in front of the TV watching as the birthdays on the screen listed draft numbers for 18-year-olds. I hoped mine would be low, so I would have to go. Karen prayed my number would be high. It was high, and I ended up in Bible college. That was it. My life went in another direction, and I never did one push-up in basic training.

Time to Grow



After accepting Jesus Christ as my Savior and Lord at the age of eighteen, I was set free from fear and demonic bondage. The Lord led me out of every facet of occult and New Age beliefs and practices—even those which other Christians thought were seemingly innocent and useful. Instead, I focused on the renewing of my mind through His Word and the empowering of His Holy Spirit. God also transformed me from being a victim of peer pressure to giving me the courage to stand alone, even in dark, dangerous situations.

I had to grow in this new relationship. I was baptized by Pastor Guy Bongiovanni and began changing from someone who only cared about himself and used people, to someone who wanted to honor the Lord and truly care for others.

My whole life was changing—sometimes faster than I could understand or keep pace with. I made many mistakes as the new Ruler of my life took charge and molded me and Karen for a purpose beyond what we could not even begin to comprehend.

The night following my salvation, Karen and I went to Sharpsville Methodist Church to hear the evangelist again. While sitting in my car in the church parking lot, Karen said something that angered me, so I slapped her across the face with the back of my hand. Inside the church, Karen's friend, April, noticed her swollen and bloody lip, and said, "Get away from him; he's crazy!" However, that was the first and last time I ever slapped Karen. I felt great remorse and never hit her again after that night.

As a brand-new Christian, I had lots of zeal but not much wisdom. I remember being in a car with Karen and one of my buddies from the West Hill. After sharing my testimony with him, I said, "Jeff, do you want to become a Christian?" He replied, "I don't think so." So, I pulled out a knife and said, "Jeff, I

am going to stab you. You are going to die and go to hell! Now do you want to become a Christian?" He replied, "Let me think about it."

A few days after my conversion, I was smoking a joint of marijuana with some other friends but that, too, was the last time, for I realized my body is the temple of the Holy Spirit. I never consumed alcohol or used drugs again.

Not long thereafter, rather than walking downtown to Warehouse Sales to buy something I needed, I drove my father's worn-out 1966 Impala Super Sport which had neither license plate nor insurance. While backing out of the parking lot, I hit a parked car. Looking around and determining that no one had seen me, I took off and drove back home.

On another occasion while I was still a very new Christian, Karen and I were stopped at a traffic light in downtown Sharon. The light was still red, but the car with two guys in it behind me honked the horn. I looked in my rearview mirror only to see the driver give me the finger. My left hand instinctively grabbed my door handle to go back and pull him out of his car when I remembered, "You are a Christian now and this is not the way you should react." Then, I recalled that Karen had put a "Honk if you love Jesus" bumper sticker on our car! I later took it off, realizing that it was not conducive to my Christian witness.

That incident may not seem like a big deal today, but back then, it felt like persecution to me. It was even harder because, although he could not recognize me, I recognized him from high school and church—he was two grades ahead of me and was a smart-mouthed arrogant person who thought he was tough. Neither the Lord nor Karen would let me do anything about his crude gesture. It took time, but God (with the help of Karen who often served as the Holy Spirit by instructing me on what I should or should not do) tamed my temper and former lifestyle.

Return Stolen Items

During those early years, I had stolen hundreds of dollars' worth of items. A few months after my conversion to Christianity, God's Spirit began to deal with me, and I began to return things to the different stores and places from where I had stolen them. At first, I took back the stuff I liked the least: the rock albums, the clothes, the jewelry and the colognes. Then, after a few more weeks, God's Spirit dealt with me even more strongly, and I looked for more things I had stolen. I returned a billy club, bayonet and other weapons.

A few weeks later, God's Spirit came heavily upon me to get rid of everything. I returned the weights, the remaining clothes, my favorite speed bag and other items I knew I could never afford, but I had to obey.

Karen and I even took money to some of the stores where we could not return the items because they were ruined or lost. The store clerks were bewildered. I told them, "Listen, I had stolen things before I was a Christian. Now, I am a believer in Jesus Christ. Please take the money!" They thought both of us

teenagers were crazy, but I wanted to maintain my integrity before my Lord. That is one of the reasons I do not charge for ministry services and resources.

Quit Lifting

While still a new Christian, some supposedly “super spiritual” Christians told me that I should not lift weights or practice karate because all that mattered was the spiritual. They quoted 1 Timothy 4:8 (NKJV): “For bodily exercise profits a little, but godliness is profitable for all things, having promise of the life that now is and of that which is to come.”

So, I quit working out and lost about 20 pounds of muscle. Some people who knew me before said, “If that’s what Christianity does, I do not want it.” Pastor Guy recognized what was happening and said to me, “The little that physical exercise does profit is very important and not to be neglected.” So, I started to lift weights again but in a somewhat modified way.

Health Spa Wants Me Back

Maxine, the owner of the health spa, called and offered me a raise to come back and manage it with the promise that she would leave me alone to run the health spa my way. She commented, “No one can run it the way you do, Bill!” This was the third time she would have hired me, after firing me twice.

Nevertheless, I felt led to not return to the health spa. Like Moses when he gave up the riches of Egypt, I turned down my dream job as a fitness instructor and being paid to lift weights. Instead, I stayed at Pit Stop changing oil in cars—standing in a pit, getting oil and grease all over me—until I would leave for Bible college. Sometime later, while home on break from Bible college, I discovered the health spa had burned down. I would have been out of a job anyway.

Embraced and Welcomed

Shortly after my conversion, I was recruited to assist with a youth group. I shared my testimony at various churches and events, taught physical fitness and self-defense classes, went on a mission trip and attended Bible college—all before I was one year old in my commitment to Christ and still a teenager. Karen was right beside me all the way.

The change in our lives was dramatic and visible. Virtually everyone who knew us realized something incredible had happened. Pastor Guy Bongiovanni of Farrell Christian Assembly and Pastor Roger Shaffer of First United Methodist Church of Sharon, as well as other pastors and Christians, helped us grow in our faith and knowledge of Scripture. Rev. Shaffer gave me a job painting the metal fire escape steps at the Sharon Methodist Church to help us financially until I was hired at Pit Stop.

Car Battery Explosion

When I first started at Pit Stop, there were two men a little older than me who were working there. It was like working with the apostles Peter and Paul. They were continually talking about Jesus and the Bible. However, after a few months, they both left for better paying jobs. To make matters worse, Tim, the new man hired as manager, despised Christians. He enjoyed making it miserable for me and repeatedly recorded fewer hours than I actually worked.

Another man, Rich from Virginia, was hired. He was nice, but was stealing money and letting me take the blame. The manager accused me of stealing the money and tried to get the owner to fire me. Finally, the owner caught Rich stealing and fired him.

It was a real struggle and a time of growth for me because of the pressure this manager put on me. One day, I almost threw him in the pit for what he said and did. Somehow, God restrained me and used the adversity to mold my life. Eventually, this manager was fired. Before he left, he apologized to me for how he had treated me and complimented me for being someone who truly lived his Christianity. That was probably the greatest commendation I could receive, making all that I endured worthwhile.

One day, my boss, Tim, told me to use an electric drill with a wire brush head on it to clean a car's battery terminals. Not being very knowledgeable about electricity or mechanics, I did so.

I was only about a foot away and looking at the battery when I must have touched the metal wire brush to the positive terminal and metal on the car at the same time. The battery exploded in my face, and I was not wearing safety glasses. The pressure on my eyes was tremendous, and the severe burning sensation from my eyes being filled with the battery acid was excruciating. It felt like my eyes were blown out of their sockets, and I was certain I was blinded. The owner of the car, who was standing several feet away, had holes burned through his coat and paint burned off his car. Pit Stop had to pay for a new coat and a paint job.

Tim was scared and rushed me into the restroom and rinsed my eyes with water and then rushed me to the hospital. On the way to the hospital, I prayed, "Lord, You did not save me to be blinded like this. Please help me!" Someone called my wife at the bank where she was working and told her there was an accident at Pit Stop, and that I was probably blinded. She came running into the hospital crying and panic-stricken.

The nurses and doctor at the hospital rinsed my eyes for over 15 minutes. They could not see any damage at all, except for some scar tissue from the surgery I had on my left eye when I was 5 years old. They said it was amazing that I was not blinded. Years later, Karen English, who worked at the dry cleaners which shared the building with Pit Stop, told three of my family members and two ministry volunteers, "I worked with Bill when the battery exploded in his face. He should have been blinded by that."

Reader's Digest (April 1992) told the account of a former baseball player who was helping a friend jump-start his car when the battery exploded and a battery cap hit him in the right eye, destroying his vision. He endured long hospitalizations, years of treatment, eight surgeries and a cornea transplant.

Bible College



One day in the summer of 1971, following prayer, Karen and I both felt led to go to Bible college. After checking on various colleges and praying, we decided to go to Mount Vernon Bible College in Mount Vernon, Ohio. To enroll, one was supposed to be a Christian for at least one year. I had only been a Christian for a couple of months, so they made an exception for me. I took correspondence courses my freshman year through L.I.F.E. Bible College (currently Life Pacific University), while still living in my parents' upstairs apartment on the West Hill.

Gang from Ohio Came to Apartment

Four guys from the Ohio gang walked right into our three-room apartment unannounced and started roaming around. They were wearing their colors and smoking. Two of them were big and extremely dangerous. Crazy George often had a pistol concealed in his boot. Karen told them to put out their cigarettes and stop smoking in our apartment. I tried to give Karen the eye to quiet her down because I knew they did not come for a picnic. She was insistent, so they finally put out their cigarettes.

One of them said to me, "We heard you became a Christian." I replied, "That is true." "And we heard that you are married." Again, I responded, "True." "And now, we hear that you are going to Bible college to become a minister." I nodded my head as I acknowledged that was so. All four of them were standing around me now, shuffling slightly, probably thinking about sending me off with some memories. Instead of doing me harm or trashing our apartment, one of them said, "We never want to see you or be associated with you again," and then they left. Once again, God protected me.

Three of them are dead now and the fourth I have not seen since our teenage

years. Two of them eventually came to the Lord. One of them I visited in the hospital several months before he died to pray with him and make certain he was ready to meet the Lord. Over the years, as other friends and acquaintances from my past recognized the genuineness of my conversion, there have been countless opportunities to share aspects of my testimony and talk about the Lord.

Mobile Home “Miracles”

In the summer of 1972, Karen and I were planning on moving to Ohio to attend Mount Vernon Bible College (MVBC) for my sophomore through senior years. We wanted to purchase a mobile home in our area from a couple at church in hopes of moving it to Mount Vernon. We faced several problems:

1. We had no money and could not get a loan on our own to buy the used mobile home—especially since we were moving it to another city and state where we had no jobs yet.
2. We did not know anyone who could move the mobile home approximately 150 miles to Mount Vernon.
3. We could not find an available lot in Mount Vernon because none of the mobile home courts in Mount Vernon would rent us a lot unless we bought a mobile home from them.
4. To make matters worse, we had no jobs or money upon our arrival in Mount Vernon.

We prayed, “Lord, if You really want us to go, You will have to make the way possible.” And He did! He provided the finances (my dad co-signed a loan) and a mover (the person selling us the mobile home found a man who would move it for us). Then, almost miraculously, we found an available lot—in fact, it was the last lot available we could rent (with the mobile home we had) in the entire city of Mount Vernon. The owner agreed to hold it for us until we were ready to move our mobile home. We hoped and prayed that our final dilemma of not having jobs would be resolved once we arrived in Mount Vernon.

Back to Mexico?

While still a young Christian, I learned a valuable lesson: not everyone who appears to be spiritual or says, “Thus says the Lord,” is really speaking the word of the Lord.

Before I was to begin my sophomore year at Mount Vernon Bible College, Karen and I went on a three-week mini-mission to Mexico. Upon our return from the mission trip, preparations were underway for our move to Mount Vernon. A woman, who was a so-called prophetess and did not know what the Lord had already clearly spoken to Karen and me, prophesied over us during a service, saying we were to go back to Mexico.

Karen wanted to go back to Mexico, but I said to her, "I am still a relatively new Christian and do not know the Word very well yet, but I do know that if God told me to go to Bible college, buy a mobile home and enabled us to find the very last mobile home lot on which we could put our mobile home in that city, then God wants me there. And that's where I am going!"

I had to decide: Do I follow the voice of someone telling me God's will for my life, or do I follow God's Word and what His Spirit has led me to do? I chose to follow the Lord and what I knew to be His clear direction. Many times since, I have reflected back on how disastrous my life and ministry would have been had I not followed His direction during that crucial decision in my life. Because I obeyed God's voice, He has produced tremendous fruit through our ministry, done the impossible through our lives and honored and blessed us greatly. This woman, who people exalted and almost deified, eventually fell away from the Lord.

Moved by Faith

On sheer faith, Karen and I obeyed the Lord and moved to Mount Vernon. Lou Collins, whom we bought the mobile home from, was kind enough to insist we take some money from him and pay it back with no interest when possible. We borrowed \$500 and eventually paid it all back.

The day our mobile home was delivered, the truck driver finished setting it up on our lot just as it was getting dark. This being the first home of our own, I did not realize we needed to hook up electricity and water. So, our first night in Mount Vernon we had no lights, heat or water. To make matters worse, I had school the next day, and had missed orientation because of the mission trip.

Karen cried that night and called her sister. The next day, her sister Linda and her husband Rick drove to Mount Vernon. Rick helped hook up the electricity, so we would have lights. A man from a nearby mobile home sales business hooked up the water and heat.

Within a few days of moving, the Lord provided jobs for both me and Karen. She was hired as a full-time teller at the local bank, and I got a job at Wenco, a window factory. I usually worked 40-60 hours per week during my sophomore and junior years. I took night classes four evenings a week, lasting four hours each night. On top of this schedule, I needed more time than most students to study and do my homework.

Mysterious Mobile Home Leak

As the autumn temperatures dropped in Mount Vernon, our mobile home began to leak. When it was warm and raining outside, the inside of the mobile home was dry. But when it would be cold outside, even when there was no snow or ice on the roof, our mobile home would leak on the inside. It was staining and

ruining the ceilings in various rooms.

Several experienced mobile home maintenance and repairmen came by to try and figure out this strange phenomenon, but no one could. We had the roof inspected and coated, but nothing worked. Finally, during one of my Bible college classes, I asked for prayer. Tommy, one of the students in the class, said he would come by and look at it on Saturday. God answered our prayer and gave him the wisdom to figure out what was happening.

Within 30 minutes, Tommy discovered the problem. The vent pipe from the furnace had been bumped out of alignment when the mobile home was moved. Instead of blowing all the exhaust fumes and heat outside, some of the heat was being blown into the ceiling when the furnace would come on, causing moisture to condense on the inside ceilings.

Through this experience, I learned the power of prayer and that God is the first one we should go to when we face a problem or a situation we cannot overcome—not the last one.

Only Cheated Myself

Although it was in the Lord's timing for me to begin Bible college as such a new Christian, it was difficult. Most of my classmates knew their Bibles well while I struggled to catch up. I also had another disadvantage because I had cheated and charmed my way through much of high school, and now it had caught up with me.

You could not have convinced me back in high school that God would one day change my life, lead me to Bible college and call me into a ministry where I would need to apply what was being taught in my high school classes—English to write books, science and history for the research I would do, geography for traveling the world to minister, math and algebra to understand the finances of running a ministry and languages for when I went on missionary outreaches to foreign lands.

At Bible college, I realized that the only one I had cheated was myself! I had to spend time looking up words in the dictionary for their spelling and meanings. It was much more difficult for me than most of the other students because I had to learn what I missed in high school, as well as try to keep up with the information the Bible college instructors were teaching us. Nevertheless, God instilled fortitude and discipline within me to strive for excellence.

Ministry Opportunities

As well as working at Wenco, attending Bible college and doing homework, I had to prepare for the physical fitness and self-defense classes I taught on Saturdays at the Mount Vernon YMCA and Bible college. For a few weeks on Sundays, I led services at a rest home. They required me to lead the songs which was not one of

my abilities or preferences. I quickly moved to assisting at a nearby church, but that was boring to me. I discovered that speaking and youth ministry were where my heart was.

During my junior year, one of my instructors, Miss Gamble, offered me an opportunity to serve as youth leader at the Appleton United Methodist Church. Other students who had taken the position did not stick it out because the church was way out in the country. Although it would be a 45-minute drive each way from our mobile home, I accepted the volunteer position.

Only one girl showed up the first Sunday night for the youth group meeting, but I still gave the message and did the activities I had planned. The next week, she brought a friend. The following week, there were four. Soon it grew to about 25 which was great for that remote area. Occasionally, I took the youth to special activities on Saturday nights. I continued as youth leader throughout my junior and senior years. The pastor and congregation honored Karen and me during the Sunday morning service of my final week. It was hard for us and the youth to say goodbye. At the time, little did I know that the Lord was preparing me those two years to build a future ministry.

Poor at Bible College

Like most Bible college students, we had very little money. Although Karen and I had jobs, they did not pay much. After tithes, mobile home and vehicle expenses, college tuition and other necessities, there was little left for food. We looked forward to the monthly \$10 check from Farrell Christian Assembly which we used to buy food. Our meals often consisted of white bread with spaghetti sauce on it.

Our daughter, Tabitha, born in the fall of my sophomore year, frequently had to wear a towel as a diaper. Several times at the grocery store, we would have to take items out of the bags because we did not have enough money to pay for them. It was embarrassing doing that while people watched and waited.

At Wenco, I started as a glass cutter but was able to move to an assembly line position as a bedder and then as a clamer. We were paid incentives for output on the assembly line, so I became one of the fastest gluers and clammers, but still did not make that much extra. When equipment broke down, the lost time was deducted from the incentives.

My right hand began to cramp from the continual rapid squeezing of the glue gun and the nail gun, so I learned to use my left hand as well. In order to deal with the boredom of an assembly line job, I made up games in which my right hand (one team) would compete against my left hand (another team). Although both of my hands began to have severe cramps, I had no alternative but to persevere. At night, I often had dreams about making windows, then would wake up with painful cramps in my hands and forearms.

Don Jensen, a fellow student at Bible college, suggested we open up a business together changing oil in vehicles to hopefully get us out of working at the factory. We named it J & R, for Jensen and Rudge. We used the wooden ramps I previously built in Pennsylvania and opened a business on a small patch of grass near my mobile home in Mount Vernon, Ohio. A well-to-do fellow Bible college student brought his Volkswagen van as our first, and last, customer. We inadvertently neglected to properly tighten the oil pan plug. The engine had to be replaced. Knowing that neither of us had the funds to pay for a new engine, he paid for it himself, and that was the end of J & R.

At graduation, the same student gave me a special gift. I had used a worn-out Bible without any commentary during my college career. He bought me a brand-new study Bible which was like giving me a new car. Don Jensen moved back to Colorado, and I never saw him again. Shortly after graduation, he was killed while hang gliding.

United Companies

In my senior year of Bible college, I had to change from night school to day school to fulfill the requirements for my degree. I had to quit my job at Wenco and find a new job. I chose to work for United Companies selling financial investments and life insurance. During an extensive three-day training program, all the trainees bragged how much they were going to sell, but I kept my mouth shut and quietly planned my strategy.

At the end of the training program, a vote was taken on who would be the most likely to succeed and who would be the least likely to succeed. The guy with the biggest mouth, the one who bragged the most about how great he was going to be as a salesperson, was voted most likely to succeed. Guess who was voted least likely to succeed? Yes, they picked me.

However, within three weeks at United Companies' state convention in Columbus, in front of everyone who voted me least likely to succeed and hundreds of other people, I was the only one from our class to be promoted to area manager. Now I would receive commissions from many of those people who voted me least likely to succeed.

Less than a year later—by the time I graduated from college—I was the only one from that entire training program who was still working for the company.

Nine Transmissions

I had my first exceptional month with United Companies and made a whopping \$600. Karen and I were excited and thought we were going to finally get caught up on bills. Then, the transmission of our yellow American Motors Hornet went out.

Nine different times, I helped Ray, a friend from Bible college, replace the transmission. I bought a used transmission from the junkyard, but it would stick in one gear. So, we exchanged it for another one which did the same. The next one also would stick in gear, so I bought a rebuilt transmission from a parts store, but it, too, stuck in gear, as did its replacement. Once again, we returned it for another rebuilt transmission which also stuck in gear. College friends with mechanical experience, who were helping us, assumed we were just having a streak of defective transmissions. So, I bought a brand-new transmission, but it too locked in one gear.

After returning a transmission for the ninth time, one of my friends finally figured out the problem. When the pressure plate was reinstalled with the first transmission, it was done incorrectly, knocking every transmission out of alignment. That's why every transmission would stick in gear. Once the pressure plate was adjusted, the ninth transmission worked perfectly. Our \$600 was wiped out, and I had to apologize to the people who sold the used, rebuilt and new transmissions.

Tabitha in the Middle of the Road

When my daughter was one and a half years old, I was in my senior year at Mount Vernon Bible College. It was close to graduation, so we sold our mobile home, and the college allowed us to move into a former professor's vacant home on campus. Two friends (a husband and wife) who were visiting us were supposed to be watching Tabitha while Karen was working and I did school work—but they were not!

Suddenly, I felt compelled to look out of the second-floor window and there she was playing in the middle of the road in rainwater and mud. The road had a sharp curve preventing a driver from seeing that anyone was on the road—especially a little one-and-a-half-year-old who was sitting down, playing in a mud puddle. If a car came, it would have smashed her little body. I had already lost a seven-year-old brother who was hit by a car, so I was motivated!

I jumped down one flight of steps, turned 180 degrees and then jumped down another. In my haste, I forgot about the low ceiling. My forehead hit the ceiling and split open. The impact was so hard it bent the metal covering and threw me back so that my lower back hit the corner of the steps.

But nothing was going to stop me from getting to her—not even the dazed and disoriented state I was in nor the blood which was now oozing over my head and face. I got up and ran directly to Tabitha, scooped her out of the road and brought her back inside. It was only then that I discovered how bad my head and back hurt. (I had pain and trouble with my back for twelve years due to a bulging disc. I did not have it checked before because I thought I would need back surgery and might become disabled. Finally, I told a chiropractor friend about my back. As soon as the herniated disc was put back in proper alignment, the pain

was gone.)

Texas, Indiana or North Carolina

Pastor Guy and Esther Bongiovanni, along with others from our home church, attended my graduation from Mount Vernon Bible College in 1975. We had hoped a position for me to teach physical fitness at the college would open up, but it never did due to financial shortages.

Youth pastor jobs were available to me in Texas, Indiana and North Carolina. The position in Lubbock, Texas, paid a fantastic \$200 a week, but that seemed too far from our families in Pennsylvania, so I turned it down.

A youth minister position in High Point, North Carolina, only paid rent and utilities, while the one in Indiana paid rent, utilities and \$100 a week. Looking at it from a monetary perspective, I turned down North Carolina. We drove to Indiana to make final plans and they already had a house for us.

We were visiting family in Pennsylvania before moving to Indiana when, two days after our meeting in Indiana, someone called to inform me that I would not become their youth minister. The person gave no explanation. Karen and I were crushed. I laid on the bed in our room at her parents' house in bewilderment, feeling like a complete failure. It seemed as though my four years of Bible college were a waste.

We prayed about what to do, but really had no other option than to accept North Carolina. The pastor and a man from the church drove a truck to Mount Vernon to haul our furniture to High Point. After helping load the truck, Karen and I returned to Pennsylvania for a week before moving to North Carolina.

We lost the nicer house they had planned to rent for us when I turned them down earlier, so we had to settle for a house that we later discovered was infested with cockroaches. (I should have learned sooner the importance of seeking and obeying His will, instead of doing it my way based on what seemed to be the most convenient and lucrative choice.)

After making the twelve-hour drive to our new home in North Carolina, Karen cried when she saw our furniture piled in the house, waiting for us to arrange it. The reality of being so far away from home hit us. We realized that we would probably never live in our hometown near our families again.

Once again, the Lord enabled me to build a youth group from a handful of youth to more than 25. The people loved me as a youth pastor, but some never let me forget that I was a Yankee with a northern accent.

Fast Fare and Youth For Christ

Our funds were extremely tight in North Carolina. Since I did not want Karen to provide all the additional funds we needed beyond the rent and utilities paid by

the church as my salary, I asked for a raise of \$5.00 a week. For whatever reason, the church board turned down my request. So, while still fulfilling my obligation as youth minister, I took a job at Fast Fare, a convenience store, to supplement our income. My next-door neighbor, the district manager, hired me to work the 11:00 p.m. to 7:00 a.m. shift. Although I did not like selling alcohol and pornographic magazines, I needed a job and thought it would be a good place to witness.

During our time in North Carolina, Karen and I were invited to attend a Youth For Christ (YFC) banquet. We were greatly impressed. I knew then that God had called me to reach young people (and adults) beyond the confines of the church.

I informed the pastor at High Point that I would be leaving when my one-year commitment was up in June. The church asked me to stay, but we felt we needed to move on. Not sure what to do next, I sought the Lord, then sent an application to YFC. Weeks passed without hearing anything.

In May 1976, I felt the Lord was speaking to my heart to quit Fast Fare, but I could not find another job to hold me over until my year agreement with the church was up in June. I had already quit the third shift (11:00 p.m. - 7:00 a.m.) because Karen was afraid of being alone at night but continued part-time.

On May 23, 1976 (5 years to the day that I was saved), the Lord strongly impressed on my heart that He wanted me out of Fast Fare. I informed my neighbor and quit that very day, having confidence the Lord would meet our needs and show us where to go. It was then that we realized the total Lordship of Christ and walking in obedience to His will, which has been our attitude ever since.

Two days later, I received a phone call from YFC. They had officially closed applications for that year but were making an exception and wanted me to come. Everyone was required to have their financial support raised by then, but once again, they made an exception and allowed me to come, even though I did not have any funds raised.

To supplement our income until my yearlong commitment to the church in High Point was completed, I worked for Manpower. In June, we moved back into my parents' upstairs apartment in Pennsylvania in preparation for my YFC training. Our house in High Point had been polluted with cockroaches, so we unloaded all our furniture and belongings in the driveway to inspect them one at a time before bringing them into our apartment. We thought we were rid of all the cockroaches until I saw one in the house a few weeks later. I was greatly alarmed because I knew how fast they could multiply, and that they are almost impossible to get rid of, especially in such a big old house. Thank the Lord that was the only one I ever saw.

In the summer of 1976, Karen and I attended the YFC Summer Institute of Evangelism for three weeks in Wheaton, Illinois. It was some of the best training I

ever received and greatly helped to establish my biblical philosophy of ministry. While there, we attended a seminar on finances. We learned that, according to Scripture, we should not get into debt or pay interest, so that was the last time we paid interest.

Karen's Liver Disease

In August 1976, Youth For Christ wanted me to move to Patterson, New Jersey, to be trained by Ron Hutchcraft, one of the top YFC directors in the nation. The only problem was I did not have sufficient support raised yet. Then YFC suggested that I move to Washington, Pennsylvania, in January 1977. But that, too, was blocked when Karen was diagnosed with a life-threatening liver disease. I informed the YFC director in Washington, "I cannot move now because my wife might not live, and I want her near our family."

I began to commute to Washington one day a week for training, while continuing to work side jobs in my local area. It was a three-hour drive each way to Washington, so I left early in the morning and arrived back home late at night. I learned to drive with my knees while commuting, so I could write my notes for speaking engagements while driving. The Lord in His mercy protected me in my foolishness from many potential accidents.

To this day, the details surrounding what caused the doctor to become so alarmed about Karen's liver condition (right after he performed tubal ligation surgery) are not fully understood. The doctor never explained to us why he did so many follow-up tests and frequent checkups for which he never charged us. One day, a receptionist in his office, whose son I knew from school, quit working for him and called to tell me that he did something terribly wrong during Karen's surgery, but she never told me what it was. Shortly thereafter, and unexpectedly, he closed his practice and moved to Florida, leaving us in a cloud of mystery.

Starting Our Own Ministry

YFC requested I move to Washington, Pennsylvania, the beginning of June 1977 for a few more months of intensive training before I started a YFC program in my area. However, I still had not yet raised sufficient funds to support my family and was uncertain about Karen's health. Also, I was teaching physical fitness and self-defense at a Christian school, speaking at several churches and youth groups. I had just started a weekly radio broadcast on a popular local station, for which we already had a sponsor and which I had to produce in the radio station's studio. Furthermore, a friend, Bob Brown, and I had recently formed the Christian Martial Arts Association.

I did not think the Lord wanted me to give up all these ministry opportunities that were coming my way, so I told YFC that I would continue commuting but could not move there. However, the director insisted I relocate to Washington for three months. While YFC is a wonderful ministry, I felt God was leading me to

develop a multifaceted ministry that specialized in areas other than what my focus would be with YFC.

To confirm that I should start my own ministry rather than continue with YFC, I asked the Lord to show me the word “national” for YFC, or “local” or “Jerusalem” for my own ministry. I prayed, and then randomly opened the Bible. My eyes instantly fell on Isaiah 40:9:

Get yourself up on a high mountain, O Zion, bearer of good news, lift up your voice mightily, O Jerusalem, bearer of good news; lift it up, do not fear. Say to the cities of Judah, “Here is your God!” (emphasis added)

I closed my account with YFC and wrote in my journal on June 6, 1977, “We’ll see how the Lord works it out.” In July, I sent out a letter to inform my supporters that I would be starting a new ministry. The rest is history. The Lord later taught me not to use the Bible as a “divining rod.”

Shortly after we started our own ministry, Karen’s life-threatening liver disease suddenly disappeared.

Ministry Beginnings



In August 1977, when I had just turned 25 and Karen was 23, with virtually no finances nor facilities—just a lot of God-given determination—Karen and I started this ministry in the upstairs apartment of my parents' home. I used the kitchen table as my desk and Karen kept the ministry records in a file cabinet in our bedroom. While most people thought our goals and vision could never be achieved, we believed God would fulfill what He was leading us to do. Thus began an incredible journey of faith and the start of a ministry that was destined to become an international outreach.

From the beginning, our goal was to build this ministry on God's Word and the leading of His Spirit. Sure, we have faced many difficulties, hard times, obstacles and impossible circumstances—we should expect nothing less considering biblical accounts. Sheree Zippay, a messianic believer, was with us from the beginning as the first of hundreds of staff and volunteers.

Some of you reading this book are witnesses to the miraculous ways the Lord has worked in and through this ministry. You know about the impossible circumstances and obstacles the Lord enabled us to overcome. Some of you were there when God stopped the rain and thunderstorms from preventing outdoor youth events and outreaches. Others of you observed God's mighty hand of protection as you traveled with me to mission fields or on other dangerous ventures.

Some of you can attest to the astonishing ways the Lord moved when we needed a financial miracle or can verify how God provided the land and enabled us to build several ministry centers without paying any interest. Some of you are eyewitnesses to the miraculous ways the Lord intervened in seemingly impossible situations.

Some of you have seen and have been part of our dream of taking the Gospel

to the ends of the earth. It is easy to dream, but not so easy to live by faith day after day and year after year. Yet, by God's grace, and with the help of some of you and so many others, that dream has become a reality.

What Is in a Name?

I wanted to name the ministry Living Truth, Inc., but Attorney David Douds, Karen's cousin, suggested we name it Bill Rudge Ministries of Living Truth, Inc. Initially, I did not want my name in it, but agreed to pray about it. Karen, Sheree Zippay and I each went to a different area of the sanctuary at Farrell Christian Assembly to pray and seek the Lord. Then, after the Lord had spoken to each of our hearts concerning the name, we would share it with each other. We would name it only if all three of us were in agreement.

Sure enough, the Lord led all three of us to name it Bill Rudge Ministries of Living Truth, Inc., but I still wanted one more confirmation. So, we wrote Living Truth, Inc. on one piece of paper and Bill Rudge Ministries of Living Truth, Inc. on another. One at a time, after prayer and shuffling the papers, we each picked Bill Rudge Ministries of Living Truth, Inc. So, I acquiesced.

With many new people continually learning about this ministry, I want to explain the meaning of its name.

BILL RUDGE—This ministry is definitely not mine, but the Lord's. There are numerous people who assist in making this ministry so effective and help to fulfill the tremendous vision and goals the Lord has given me. It was never my desire to have my name included as I had strongly opposed the idea until the Lord gave definite direction concerning the name. We now see the Lord's wisdom in our ministry's name. With so many organizations rising up with Christian-sounding names, it is hard to distinguish a solid biblical ministry from one that is not. However, because I have a reputation as a speaker and author, who boldly stands for biblical Christianity, credibility has been added to the ministry. Another consideration is that with many ministries being taken over by hostile boards, it is harder to do so with my name attached to it.

Interestingly, my initial birth certificate was Dale Eugene Rudge, which my mother changed shortly after birth to William (Bill) John Rudge. Also, Karen's grandfather told her parents not to name her Ginger. It could have been Dale Rudge Ministries with Dale and Ginger. "Bill" means "bold protector" or "determined guardian." We think this is a most appropriate name since I am known for being a "bold protector" and "determined guardian" of the "faith which was once for all handed down to the saints" (Jude 3).

I told a Haitian pastor, who ministers right in the middle of a voodoo village, that his name "Bill" means "bold protector." Also, I told him, "We are not to be cowardly or bashful, but bold! But in our boldness, we are not to be arrogant or boastful, but confident and courageous for the Lord!"

MINISTRIES—That is what we are all about. We are a growing local, national

and international outreach ministry (Acts 1:8) dedicated to sharing Christ with a searching world and challenging believers to reach their maximum potential—physically, mentally, emotionally and spiritually.

LIVING TRUTH—Jesus said, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life...” (John 14:6), “and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free” (John 8:32). The resurrected Christ is the LIVING TRUTH!

INCORPORATED—We were incorporated on August 8, 1977, as a non-profit, non-denominational, religious and educational organization.

Flashbacks

Since giving my life to Christ, I have had many flashbacks of my past—some good and some not so good. Some flashbacks took time to fade, such as when I would be in a store or situation similar to something I was in before I was a Christian. Although I never stole again after becoming a Christian, my mind would sometimes revert back and I would feel guilty and strange, as if I were being watched because the clerk thought I was trying to steal something. I would keep my hands out of my pockets, so they would know I was not trying to steal anything. Eventually, living a life of integrity removed all such feelings.

Some people from my past were elated about my transformation, and some were not. Some helped me with the ministry, others opposed it. Some were quick to forgive and forget bygones, some were not. Many people who know my past cannot believe that God could change me, and those who came to know me after I came to Christ cannot believe what I once was like.

A former female classmate was astonished to hear me speak at the church she attended. She called the ministry the next day and told me that I really had a lot of courage to come back to this area and start a ministry—right where I did so many bad things and used and abused so many people. In the end, most people became convinced that God had genuinely changed my life.

Several years after the Sadie Hawkins dance incident, I was at a church sharing my testimony about how God changed my life. In the audience was the teacher I almost beat up when I was drunk at the dance. He did not say a word, but I am certain he remembered me. When my son went to third grade, out of all the teachers he could have had, he ended up with this teacher from the Sadie Hawkins dance incident. I was concerned that if he realized BJ was my son, he would take it out on him. Regardless, BJ had a good school year, except for the time that teacher got mad and threw him and his desk across the room. Over the years, that teacher heard me (and BJ) speak several times at different churches he attended. Eventually, he and his wife asked for help with their son and became faithful supporters of our ministry.

Obstacles and Opposition

When we first started the ministry, many people said we could not do it; others have tried and failed. Some people even opposed us. A representative from a large ecumenical organization asked me, "Who do you think you are to start a ministry in this area without our endorsement?" I replied, "I did not know you even existed, and I did not know I needed your approval to obey what God has led me to do."

A few churches, businesses and individuals were willing to help us, but most were not. Some people knew my past and either did not like me or were uncertain I had truly changed. Others thought I would soon give up and quit. When I asked Florence Kilgore to publish a book I was working on, she laughed and said I looked like a hood. (A few years later, she asked me if she could publish some of my books.)

For the Lord does not see as man sees; for man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart
(1 Samuel 16:7b nkjv).

The local YMCA director refused to let me rent the gym for youth events. He snidely commented that I would fail in my efforts, so I should not even waste my time trying. Shortly thereafter, he was replaced by a Christian director who freely offered us the gym. Within a short time, we had access to many outside facilities and gyms in both churches and schools.

In 1977, the ministry's total income from donations was about \$3,000. In 1978, it increased to just over \$11,000. For several years, along with the 25-40 hours I put in each week for ministry, I used my paychecks from teaching physical fitness and self-defense at a Christian school, delivering furniture for Bennington Furniture Company, doing inventory for the Golden Dawn grocery chain, painting, cleaning cars or anything else I could do to make money to pay the ministry's bills and my family's expenses.

When our son BJ was still a toddler, he was standing at the top of the stairs of my parents' house. Somehow he fell through the gate, tumbled down the steep, hard, wooden steps and lay motionless at the bottom of the stairs. Fearing he was dead or seriously injured, I ran down to pick him up. Astonishingly, he was fine. Since we could not afford carpet, I went to a floor covering store that morning and obtained about 14 free carpet samples which I nailed down on every step in case he fell down those steps again. Fortunately, he never did.

Shattered Ankle

In April 1978, the ministry was less than a year old and beginning to take off when I broke my ankle in a freak accident at one of our teen outreaches at the roller rink. Karen and a staff member drove me to the hospital. I thought they would just put a cast on me and send me home. I was shocked when the doctor said, "You are going to have to stay here." Arlene Karp, a nurse who supported our ministry, told me years later that she was on duty when I came in and

someone told her, "The kid from the West Hill who became a minister was brought in."

My ankle required extensive surgery, and I was hospitalized for a week. It appeared the ministry would end abruptly because it would wipe us out financially since I did not have hospitalization insurance. Karen and I were paying many of the ministry bills from the jobs I was working on the side; plus, much of the ministry at that time was based on my physical abilities: leading recreation, fitness classes, presenting self-defense clinics and giving demonstrations in schools and churches.

In the past, I had fallen many times performing various physical feats but had never been injured. Then, just tripping wearing skates caused one of the worst breaks the orthopedic surgeon said he had ever seen—other than from severe car wrecks. During the surgery, the doctor had to put a seven-inch rod in one side of my ankle and into the bone marrow of my leg, and wire in the other side of my ankle. Twice my cast turned red from bleeding following the surgery and had to be changed.

Determined to strengthen my ankle and keep in shape, as soon as I recovered from the anesthesia, I began to design and implement my own rehabilitation program. At first, it was merely moving my toes in my cast and doing light exercises in my hospital bed. I forced myself to stand on crutches and walk the halls even though the pain was excruciating. (I did this years before it was recommended to be up and moving right after surgery—back then it was usually just bed rest.)

The day I was released from the hospital, I was scheduled to speak at my college alma mater. The doctor discouraged me from traveling so far, but only permitted it because of my persistence. It was the first time the college had asked me to speak since my graduation. (I had accepted the engagement before the accident and do not like to cancel when I make a commitment.) Karen drove me the three hours to Mount Vernon Bible College in central Ohio. I had to preach sitting on a stool with a pillow under my leg, elevated on a chair; the pain was extreme, but I endured it. The response to my lecture by students and faculty was very good and made the trip worthwhile.

Once at home, I modified my strength training routine to accommodate my physical limitations: I would lie in bed or on the floor and use dumbbells, or go outside and hobble on my crutches or hop on one foot to the swing set to do pull-ups, then hop on one foot up the steps on the monkey bars to do dips. After the cast was off, I designed various exercises to strengthen my injured ankle and leg —long before physical therapy became popular. The doctor was amazed at the speed of my recovery.

Instead of destroying me as I had feared, these circumstances became somewhat of a blessing and victory! The advantage of this near disaster affirmed my faith and increased my determination. I learned that, no matter what should happen, God would always make a way, and that I was to never give up.

Shortly before this accident, I had applied for medical insurance through a mission organization, but for some reason, they never acted upon it. I also had called an insurance agent to obtain coverage for Teen Life events, but he never called back, so we were without insurance coverage.

Karen and I knew it was going to be expensive without insurance and we did not know how we were going to pay for it since I was temporarily unable to work. About the third day in the hospital, the Lord gave Karen and me a peace that our needs would be met. Churches and individuals who heard about our dilemma contributed about \$250. Someone at the hospital suggested we apply for financial assistance. The surgeon's nurse told us the doctor would not accept it, but the doctor said not to worry because he was going to write me off anyway. However, he did accept the financial aid which also paid 100 percent of the hospital bill. The extra money that came in was used to pay off our past hospital bill.

God Provides Shelter and Food

The ministry kept growing, so in the summer of 1978, we started looking for a house or apartment to rent that had three bedrooms and a potential office. The Highland Apartments seemed perfect, with an office in the basement and being next to the pool and basketball court where a lot of teens hung out.

We went to put a deposit on it, but someone else had already done so. We felt dejected and our families thought we did not know what we were doing. However, the next morning the Lord spoke to our hearts that it would be open and sure enough, they called and said the people had removed their deposit.

We had no money but wrote out a deposit check for \$280. Then, we received an \$8.00 overdraft charge. Another lesson learned: Do not write checks with insufficient funds.

Since we were often short of funds, there was usually little food in our refrigerator. Karen's mother, not yet a Christian, would look in our refrigerator, then say to me, "When are you going to get a paying job and provide for my daughter and grandchildren?" So, I used a trick I had learned while working at Kroger grocery store as a teen. Pull everything to the front to make the shelves look full. In similar fashion, I would pull the six or seven items we had to the front of the refrigerator. When she opened the door she said, "You finally got some food!"

When our daughter Tabitha and son BJ were young, I would bring home a bag of groceries and say, "Guess what I have?" After a couple of guesses, I would say, "We have cereal!" as I pulled out a box of cereal. Each time I did so with a different food item in the bag, they would excitedly jump and clap.

The ministry kept growing, requiring so much of my time that I had to quit my side jobs and trust the Lord to meet our needs. In the summer and fall, we were thankful for fruits and vegetables in season and friends' gardens. During

September 1978, I had not been paid anything in two weeks, and we had been out of groceries for three days. However, the Lord provided for us through tomatoes, grapes, apples and other summer and fall fruits and vegetables, as well as meat or poultry given to us at just the right time.

Karen paid the ministry bills first, so the ministry would have a good name. When funds were tight (as they often were), I would receive only a portion (or nothing at all) of my designated salary. The entire ministry income for 1978 was only \$11,000.

And do not seek what you will eat and what you will drink, and do not keep worrying. For all these things the nations of the world eagerly seek; but your Father knows that you need these things. But seek His kingdom, and these things will be added to you
(Luke 12:29-31).

Last Day to Raise \$1,000

In October 1978, the ministry was now 14 months old. I explained to the Board of Directors that we needed a minimum of \$1,000 in donations for the month of October so we could pay all ministry bills, and I could receive my \$50-a-week salary, which I had not received since the ministry began. If we did not reach the goal of \$1,000 by October 31, then I would go back to working on the side (teaching self-defense, delivering furniture, doing inventory and anything else I could) to cover ministry expenses and meet my family's needs.

Well, it was October 31 and all donations for this month totaled \$981.25—short of the \$1,000 goal. I had made a verbal commitment, so I told Karen I would go back to working secular jobs on the side. Then, at 10:30 p.m. that night, Sheree Zippay showed up at our apartment door and handed us \$20.00, which brought the income for October to \$1,001.25. I did not go back to working jobs on the side and have lived on faith ever since.

We struggled for several more years, but God always provided. We had food drives for needy families at Christmas. I never told anyone that we were actually worse off than most of the families we were helping.

Short to Pay Rent

It was December 1, 1978, and we were short to pay the November rent. I knew the Lord wanted us in the Highland Apartments, so why not meet the need? Are we misusing the money before the rent is due? We both agreed that we were not.

All we received at the post office that day was \$10, so we were \$190 short to meet the November rent payment. "Maybe I should call Bennington and start driving the furniture delivery truck again," I told Karen. But I knew the Lord showed me last month not to do so. Then, the phone rang. It was Sharpsville Methodist Church, and the secretary said she had a check on her desk for us for a

couple of days but did not have our address. We gave it to her and were encouraged as we remembered that the previous year they gave a check for \$360.

Why So Hard?

For about 10 years, from the time I came to Christ in 1971 until about four years into our ministry in 1981, Karen and I lived in poverty. It looked as though we would never have anything. I often wondered why, throughout my Christian life and in our ministry, God permitted so many difficulties; we seemed to do everything the hard way.

Karen and I believed that one reason for our financial struggles was that no one could say we were in the ministry for the money. All they would have to do is consider our history, and they would know better.

We are glad we persevered through our impoverished beginnings and the struggles of hard times. No one can say that we serve Him only for the blessings. We served the Lord when we had nothing—with no hope of ever having anything—and we serve the Lord when He blesses us. The Lord has greatly blessed us and our ministry. If He were to take away everything He has given to us, we would still serve Him.

We would never have been able to handle all of the responsibilities of a growing international outreach ministry if God had not first taught us these things gradually. God taught us how to wisely budget and maximize funds through our lean beginnings so there is no waste in our ministry, and in the future, when money gets tight for all ministries, we can continue to operate efficiently.

God has taught us the truth that “all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose” (Romans 8:28). We have walked with the Lord for more than 50 years, and we can honestly testify to the true reality of this scriptural promise. Although we have faced many hard times, difficulties and impossible circumstances over the years, the Lord always intervened in His time and in His way to enable us to overcome them.

God Knows How to Humble

People who get things too easily tend to buckle more quickly under pressure. Quick success often results in pride, which will quickly ruin any ministry.

Similar to what God said concerning Saul, “I will show him how much he must suffer for My name’s sake” (Acts 9:16), He must have thought concerning me, “I will show Bill how much he will be humbled for My name’s sake.” In many ways, I have learned the truth of James 4:6, “God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble.” From being voted the guy with the prettiest eyes in my senior class superlative poll to almost losing my eyesight several times. From having lustrous hair with a natural blond streak to losing it all. From being

muscular to thinning down due to regular fasting. From being seemingly invulnerable to injury to experiencing a badly broken ankle and other accidents. From having great potential in karate matches to never fighting again. From careless youthful days of loud music to hearing loss later in life. From being one of the youngest ministers in my region to being one of the longest-serving clergy. However, whatever I lost or gave up for the Lord was, in many ways, restored a hundredfold.

Miracle of the Land and Ministry Centers



When our ministry was still very young, my wife and I were living in the Highland Apartments in Hermitage, Pennsylvania. As the ministry continued to grow, we began looking for a house to move into so we could have a yard for recreation. Instead of opening just one door so we could conveniently walk through it, God opened two doors simultaneously. As I sought the Lord's will, He spoke to my heart to move into the smaller house. In obedience, I did. For months, I wondered why. I said, "You know I trust You Lord, but that other house was so much nicer and much more adequate." He spoke to my heart, "Trust Me!"

A few months later, March 1981, 3.7 acres of prime land, located behind the house we were renting, was donated to us by the Boston Development Associates. Shortly thereafter, we stepped out in faith to build a ministry center and parsonage under the supervision of Gordon Urmson and with the help of many other volunteers.

One Sunday after church, a man dropped by our house. He said, "You do not know me. My name is Bill Schlegel. I am an ex-alcoholic and God has changed my life. I work for T. Bruce Campbell Construction Company, and if you ever need a crane, I can get you one for free any Saturday." I told him, "Next Saturday at 9:00 a.m." The following Saturday, all the roof trusses at the ministry center were put up.

The Lord provided in some mighty ways, enabling us to overcome overwhelming obstacles and complete both building projects without paying any interest.

“Rakereation”

After the ministry center and parsonage were completed, we needed to prepare the land for outside recreation. John Rust donated his services and spent weeks using his bulldozer to level the playing areas.

After the land was leveled we had to remove numerous rocks from all over our property. I did not want anyone getting hurt during recreation by falling on a rock. Allan Titus spent many hours on his tractor raking the larger rocks. After he had raked all he could, the rest had to be raked by hand before the grass seed could be planted.

We also needed straw to place over the grass seed. While fasting on a Monday for the Lord to meet the need, Allan Titus pulled in about 11:30 a.m. with a truckload of over 100 bales of straw he donated.

We had numerous what I called “rakereations” where our staff, Board and ministry friends would rake and then have a hotdog roast. We were able to get some large sections raked, grass seed planted and covered with straw. Eventually, people got tired of the huge project and only one or two people showed up. Many days, no one helped me. I was determined to get out of the mud and get the seed in before the grass planting season was over so we could use it for recreation. For weeks, I got up early to rake for an hour or so before working all day in the office and then raked a few more hours by myself after work until dark.

I started to develop an attitude of bitterness and complaining, but the Lord encouraged me to have an attitude where I actually enjoyed the raking (most of the time). Instead of getting discouraged, I decided to look at it as an opportunity to develop inner strength, discipline and determination. I considered it cardiovascular exercise —I usually work fast and non-stop which meant I did not have to do my regular workout routine. I also enjoyed the time to talk with the Lord and dwell on His Word.

Then, BJ contracted pneumonia, so Karen and I took shifts at the hospital. Karen and I fasted and prayed that the field would get seeded. We hoped the Lord would send someone to finish the whole field, but that never happened. So, day by day, I continued to rake and plant a section of grass at a time until it was all completed.

New Addition

In January 1986, a few years after completing the first building project, Mike Dunder informed me he wanted to donate his services to build a large addition to the ministry center consisting of a mini gymnasium for special outreaches, recreation and a weightlifting room. I began to seek the Lord through prayer and fasting to make certain He was leading us to do so and to have the assurance He would meet the ministry’s needs.

In March of 1986, I was one hundred percent certain the Lord wanted us to

step out in faith and begin. As soon as we did, everything began to go wrong. During this time, my family was heading into one of the deepest, darkest valleys we have ever gone through. In February 1987 while flying on a Jordanian airline, I looked at a map of the Middle East. Israel was conspicuously missing. During that trip, my family experienced the trauma of nearly being hijacked in an Arab country—all because we had Israeli stamps in our passports. Can you imagine the emotional distress of being in a foreign land where they do not speak your language, have a completely different culture and mindset, and don't care whether you live or die? Our “Jordan Experience” began a four-month ordeal (February-June, 1987) that almost ended everything, but once again, the Lord intervened and delivered. (*My Strength through Weakness* booklet contains a more detailed account of this harrowing ordeal.)

However, a little more than a year after stepping out in faith and facing many insurmountable problems and with virtually all volunteer labor under Mike's supervision, the Lord once again made the impossible a reality.

Another Crane Miracle

Mike Dunder set Saturday, August 9, 1986, as the day to put the roof trusses up. He lined up Bill Schlegel, who was getting a crane donated from T. Bruce Campbell Construction Company, to lift the roof trusses. Many other workers were coming to help.

Although I had to run the recreation activities at Lakeside E. C. Family Camp that Saturday morning, I set up photos and feature articles with various newspaper and magazine reporters from *The Sharon Herald, Youngstown Vindicator, Warren Tribune, New Wilmington Globe, Pathway and Vista*.

Mike called me Thursday night to tell me that the crane would be out of town and would not be back for Saturday, and there was no other Saturday for a couple of weeks that they could do it. In addition to the crane problem, the local weather forecasts on Thursday were calling for thundershowers on Saturday. It appeared hopeless as we faced yet another seemingly impossible situation!

Karen and I did the only thing we knew how to do in situations like that: we prayed and fasted. Mike and his wife Ruthann also prayed earnestly. Friday morning, Mike called to tell me that somehow Bill Schlegel was able to get the crane for Saturday. The weather report was now calling for sunny skies on Saturday.

On Saturday, the weather was sunny and dry, the crane and workers showed up and they put up the trusses and the roof. I did not think there was any way the Lord could be glorified with the crane the way He was on our first building, but, once again, He was!

More than 300 churches, groups, businesses and individuals, locally and throughout the country, helped us build that large addition by donating monies, labor, supplies, equipment or food for the workers. Many said they have never

seen any organization get such a tremendous response, especially from such a diversity of groups.

Over the years, we have had several extensive building projects—two ministry centers valued at over a million dollars—all by faith without paying any interest. Hundreds of illustrations regarding God’s miraculous provision of our land and ministry centers are covered in further detail in my book *Overcoming the GIANTS in Your Life* or are recorded in my journals for posterity.

Writing 25 Books

I thought that building the first ministry center and parsonage at the same time, or subsequent formidable projects and extensive outreaches were the most difficult challenges of my life. However, I felt like a recluse while writing 25 books (14 brand-new books and 11 major rewrites) in two years (January 1, 2022 - December 31, 2023). These 25 books contain many of the lessons the Lord has taught me over the years, the scriptural insights He has given me and the miracles I have witnessed in His name. I finished writing the last of these 25 books, *The Impossible* (which you are reading now), at 11:47 p.m. on New Year’s Eve 2023. Truly, the God who led me to do it was faithful to enable me to fulfill it!

God knew the feat I was taking on was “impossible,” but He has faithfully supplied the inspiration, strength and energy (many early mornings, long days and late nights). It was a momentous endeavor I never could have accomplished without the Lord’s anointing, the support of my wife and family, the sacrifices of those who proofread and confirmed Scripture references, the assistance of many staff and volunteers who helped me with other ministry responsibilities, as well as the many individuals, churches and businesses who have contributed toward the cost of printing and distributing these books. The Lord will one day richly reward all who participated in helping us touch countless lives with the Gospel.

Amazing Weather



During the ten years that we sponsored dozens of special outdoor outreaches, August 1977- September 1987, it is truly amazing that we were never rained out. There were many eyewitnesses concerning the Lord's intervention in supposedly hopeless weather conditions so that we never had to cancel an event.

I believe the Lord honored us in this way because we always prayed, fasted and sought His will concerning what events to sponsor and when to schedule them. Facing a forecast of bad weather, I refused to cancel and would pray, fast and trust Him. He did some amazing interventions!

I can remember numerous times when it looked like we were going to be rained out or thunderstorms were forecast during the time of our event. An hour before the event was scheduled to start, some of my staff and I would go out, hold hands, pray and set up the outside equipment by faith. Although it seemed hopeless, we would see the sun come out and dry the ground at our ministry center and our event would go on.

Several times, it stopped raining just minutes before our event or started raining just minutes after. During one of our events, we received reports that it was raining in communities on three sides of the location of our ministry center but not on us. The following are shortened accounts of just a few of the amazing weather conditions.

Horseback Riding

After horseback riding in June 1979 during the early days of Teen Life, the teens and staff were sitting around a campfire singing and sharing. The sky to the west, north and south of us became dark as it rained all around us, but our event continued without any rain. Many parents came early to pick up their kids

because they thought the rain had surely ruined our evening.

Jesus 1984 Exercise Clinic

I was asked to be a guest speaker and lead an exercise clinic at Jesus '84 at Agape Farm. This was the first time they ever scheduled such a fitness event. Right before the first exercise clinic was to begin, it was raining and appeared it was not going to end. My wife Karen, Karen Dobresk and Rick Chenoweth who were assisting me, met with me at the back of the stage where we held hands and prayed asking the Lord to stop the rain so the exercise clinic could be held.

We knew this first clinic was crucial because many thought exercise was irrelevant and the rain could appear as God's confirmation of this. But within a few minutes of our prayer, and almost exactly at 8:00 a.m. (start time), the rain stopped, and we had a wonderful event.

Final Fling

We had our Final Fling Fellowship scheduled for Saturday, June 22, 1985, from 6:30 - 9:30 p.m. for Kids Life and Teen Life. I had planned various outdoor activities, along with Gary Elliot, former New York Yankee, as our speaker followed by the showing of the sports movie, "Football Fever."

The weather reports were calling for rain and severe thundershowers Saturday afternoon and continuing into the evening. So, Karen and I fasted till noon and prayed. By 4:00 p.m., it looked impossible as the rain poured down. I needed at least an hour to set up all the recreation equipment.

Randy Carnino, one of the volunteers, told someone that we had never been rained out. They responded, "It looks like your streak is over." Staff and youth started to call to see if the event was canceled. I said we would have it inside if need be, but we were still hoping the Lord would do another "miracle."

At 5:00 p.m., it stopped raining. The sun came out and dried up the ground and we had enough time to set up the equipment. Despite the earlier rain and severe weather reports, we still had more than 120 show up and the Lord greatly blessed us. The staff and helpers had great attitudes and the message and movie were inspiring.

Raining on Three Sides

I shared at our orientation session for the upcoming Teen Life and Kids Life Super Burger Bash on Saturday, September 20, 1986, from 6:00 - 8:00 p.m., that although weather reports were calling for rain all weekend, for nine years, the Lord had not let one of our outdoor special outreaches be rained out.

Saturday morning, it was pouring, so Karen and I fasted and prayed. At about 10:30 a.m., the sun came out, and it was beautiful for the YMCA soccer game I

coached at noon. The weather went back and forth from sunny to cloudy and rained again at about 4:30 p.m., but the sun quickly dried it up. Then, it was sprinkling about 5:50 p.m., but by 6:00 p.m., it had completely stopped.

Bill Hand, who worked for a local newspaper and published a Christian magazine, jokingly told his wife, “Let’s go over to Rudges where it never rains during a special outreach.” He was shocked when he arrived at 6:45 p.m. to find more than 250 kids, teens and volunteers happily involved in the Super Burger Bash. Bill Hand said it was pouring down rain at 6:30 p.m. when he was about seven miles east of our ministry center. We also received reports from Virginia Snyder that at around 6:30 p.m., it was pouring down rain in West Middlesex and on South Keel Ridge Road which are south of our ministry center. Then, Allan Titus informed us it was pouring about that same time at his place in Sharpsville which is north of our ministry center.

From all indications, it was pouring down rain around us on three sides, but the Lord honored what was to be one of our best events.

Kids’ Summer Fun Event

The following article, *Weather or Not*, was written by Jim Weikal and published in our March 2022 newsletter:

One of my first memories of helping at the Bill Rudge Ministries goes back to August 21, 1987. The occasion was a “Kids’ Summer Fun Event” on a Friday night from 7:00 - 11:00 p.m. Bill was reminded at the staff training session the night before that the weather report was calling for thunderstorms on Friday and Saturday. Bill calmly replied, “I’ve heard that before” and assured them that since the Lord had led us to have this outreach, somehow He would also provide good weather.

By 5:00 p.m. on Friday, the rain stopped, so we could set up the equipment. By 6:00 p.m., the sun was shining brightly and continued to do so during the outside recreation. I recall that the number of kids was close to a couple hundred. All enjoyed the youthful games and supervised activities.

Later that evening, Bill asked me to start a campfire for the kids. I remember looking upward with some skepticism because I anticipated raindrops flowing down at any moment. The ominous, menacing and rolling gray clouds hung low over the ministry center. It seemed they would burst at any moment. Bill said a quick prayer asking God to hold back the rain so he could finish the outside activities and feed the kids around the campfire before going inside the ministry center as previously planned.

I finished preparing the fire for the kids’ enjoyment. As we answered the call to go inside, the rain started to fall slowly, then progressively increasing in intensity. Amazingly, no one got wet. Bill had on his

schedule that at 10:30 p.m. we would go inside the building, and at almost exactly 10:30 it started to rain.

The experience impressed me so much that I recall it even now, over 35 years later.

Last Super Burger Bash

Following my usual procedure, I spent time fasting and in prayer before setting the date for the final Super Burger Bash for Friday, September 18, 1987. It started raining Saturday, September 12, and continued raining on and off—many times very severely—every day of the week until Thursday. When I got up Thursday morning, one day before the Burger Bash, it was pouring down rain. The ground was already so saturated that the water splashed under my feet with every step across our property. To make matters worse, the weather report that morning was calling for continued rain until at least Monday of the next week.

Even if the Lord stopped the rain as He has done in the past, how could we hold an event with the ground so wet? More importantly, few would show up if they thought it was going to rain.

In prayer Thursday morning, I felt impressed to begin fasting on just water, which I continued until after the Burger Bash. At our staff meeting Thursday night, I said, “I do not know how, but the Lord will hold off the rain and be glorified through this event.” Most of the staff and volunteers had seen the Lord do it before and believed that He would do it again.

On Friday, the day of the Super Burger Bash, it was pouring down rain when I woke up, but the Lord gave me peace and I assured Karen and everyone else that the Lord led me to have it on this day, and I had 100 percent confidence that it would not rain during our event.

Throughout the day, the sun would come out and we would think, this is it, but then an hour later, it would be pouring down rain again. This happened at least six times.

In this apparently hopeless situation, I had to examine myself. Was I presumptuous in believing the Lord led me to set that date? Was I wrong in verbalizing that I was confident it would not rain? Was I being proud or seeking to glorify myself? After honest examination, I was positive the answer to all the above was “No!” And the Lord kept impressing on me to trust Him and believe.

It would have been easy to worry, fear, murmur, complain, lose hope and faith as my impossible situation grew worse. But instead, Karen and I chose to trust the Lord and praise His name knowing we were obeying Him, and that He would somehow be glorified. On a far lesser scale, I could somewhat identify with Daniel’s lions’ den or David’s Goliath contest or Joseph’s pit experience or Moses against the Red Sea. I knew you could not see God do the miraculous unless you were in an impossible situation. Thinking back over the years, this

was probably our most hopeless weather situation ever.

At 3:30 p.m., Tim Jones arrived to set up equipment. It was pouring down rain and, although he had believed it would not rain before, he felt it was probably hopeless now. However, within about 15 minutes, the rain stopped, and the sun came out. As the other volunteers arrived at 4:00 p.m., I got them together outside and we held hands and prayed. Then, we began setting up the equipment by faith, trusting that the rain would not follow its regular pattern of pouring down every hour or so, but that it would not rain until after the Burger Bash was over.

All day Friday, calls from youth leaders, parents and young people came in asking us if we were still having it. Lois Greathouse, our secretary that day, assured them we would be having it and that it would not rain. I felt almost crazy telling people while it was pouring down rain that it would stop for our Burger Bash, but by faith, I did so.

Approximately 150 youth and volunteers (who either believed in our track record or were just crazy enough to come in spite of the weather conditions) showed up for the Super Burger Bash. The rain never started again after 4:00 p.m., and it was a great night. In fact, with the unexpected addition of a mud bowl to all the activities we did, most of the young people thought it was one of the most fun events we ever had.

Someone who came to the Burger Bash late said that at 6:45 p.m. it was pouring down rain in Youngstown. My daughter Tabitha, who was returning from a soccer game in Beaver County between 7:00 and 8:00 p.m., said it poured down rain off and on the whole way home. When Tabitha told her boyfriend about our track record of not being rained out, he said, "I am afraid your dad got rained out this time!" But when they got near Hermitage, it was not raining, and when he arrived at the end of the Burger Bash, he was shocked to hear that we had no rain at all.

In Sunday School the following Sunday, I shared how the Lord stopped the rain. Jim Leali, who lives in Hermitage and who had donated 1,000 hamburgers for the event, told the class that at about 6:15 - 6:30 p.m. on Friday he said to his wife, Pat, "I have never seen our barometer so far in the rain area before without it raining!"

Eyewitness

Randy Carnino writes the following:

I had the privilege of being a volunteer and youth counselor for the Bill Rudge Ministries from the early 1980s to the early 1990s. On many occasions, rain was forecast for the time that the outside outreaches were scheduled. I can testify that not once on those occasions did the weather cause any cancellations or delays. God always provided in miraculous ways and allowed for thousands of youth to hear the Gospel message.

Thunderstorm While Digging Garage Footers

On Tuesday, June 8, 1993, John Rust was scheduled to excavate and dig footers for the new garage we were building. He was supposed to come in the morning but was delayed until early afternoon. Around 2:30 p.m., Mona Wilson, our neighbor, heard on a scanner that a severe thunderstorm was heading directly for us. She came over and told John Rust, along with Mike Dunder and Bob Davis who were helping John, they had better get out of there. Bob said, "Bill and the rest of them are probably over at the ministry center praying so don't worry!" He was right!

When I saw the sky turn black, I got all the staff working at the ministry (Lori Johnson, Nancy Staul, Karen, Florence and Tabitha Rudge) together. I said, "We need the Lord to intervene so they can finish since this is the only day John (who was donating his services) could do it." Bob Davis said, and Mike confirmed, that "the storm was heading right for them and was only a couple hundred yards away, but at the same time we were praying, they said it actually bypassed them and headed east toward the Mall."

I stayed with them as we continued to finish the job. About 3:15 p.m., when they were almost done, lightning started to flash all around us but not in our immediate area. At 3:30 p.m., just as John finished our job and headed over to a neighbor's house, and as Bob and Mike headed to their cars, the sky started pouring down rain and lightning. The Lord held back the storm the whole time they worked on our property, but at the exact moment they finished, the storm hit.

Great Weather During Italy, Turkey and Greece Trip

My son BJ and I went on a three-week trip to Italy, Turkey and Greece with Talbot Theological Seminary (December 28, 1998 - January 20, 1999). We would be investigating the archaeology and geography of these three countries and would be outside quite a bit of the time. We were told to expect cold and rainy weather since that is what the group encountered on the last trip and what is normal for that time of year.

Since I would be away during my regular time of prayer and fasting for the Ministry the beginning of January, I moved it to the first part of December before our trip. I prayed for good weather, knowing it would be much more difficult to research sites and learn in the rain and cold. Sure enough, the weather was unseasonably warm and usually sunny. We did more than previous groups since it was not so overcast. The only time it rained was when we crossed the border to Greece. It poured and thundered for about an hour when we were on the bus. By the time we reached our destination and had to get off the bus, it was sunny and dry. We also were told when we arrived in Greece that it was pouring down rain in Athens, but when we got to Athens several days later, it was sunny.

Steve Parks read my pamphlet, "The Impossible," during the trip and said to

others on the trip, "It's not going to rain; Bill Rudge is with us." I thank the Lord that during the whole trip we had excellent weather and had no rain at all, other than that brief time while we were traveling on the bus.

Miracle in Torrential Downpours at Sergeant York Dedication

For several months, one day a week our staff and many others prayed and fasted for good weather on the day of the World War I and Sergeant York 90th Anniversary Commemoration in the Argonne Forest of France. However, on October 3, 2008, one day before this big event, the weather was cold and rainy—often torrential downpours. It appeared the extensive ceremonies, which BJ and I were to be a part of on Saturday, October 4, would be marred by heavy rain that was forecast to continue for several more days.

So, on the evening of October 3 in the American Cemetery in the apartment used by General Pershing, I gathered those present for special prayer. BJ, Colonel Mastriano (who meticulously coordinated the event) and his wife and son, Chaplain Robinson (who picked me and BJ up in Frankfurt, Germany, in a military vehicle) and his wife and son, joined me to pray for a miracle. I earnestly entreated the Lord to intervene in this impossible situation and provide good weather for the next day's ceremonies. My wife Karen and other prayer intercessors in the U.S. prayed for a weather miracle.

Shortly before the ceremonies and dedication were to begin on the morning of October 4, the rain miraculously stopped, and the sun came out. It turned out to be a beautiful sunny day filled with wonderful ceremonies. The very next day, it began raining again. A reporter for a German magazine wrote in his article about the amazing phenomenon of how the sky seemed to open and the sun came out on the day of the York Commemoration. Our God is an awesome God!

Not to Be Taken Out of Context

When you consider the dozens of special outreaches we had over that 10-year period (1977-1987), and even the many amazing weather occurrences since then, the only reasonable explanation is that the God of the Bible did some creative interventions. But we must keep in mind that rain during these events would have destroyed them because we had too many young people to bring inside and most of the activities planned needed to be done outside.

I cannot explain why God chose to honor us in this manner. Perhaps, it was because we sincerely sought His will and guidance before setting an event, and when it looked hopeless, we refused to cancel and humbled ourselves through fasting and utterly trusting Him. I also believe He used it to validate the international focus He was leading us to and preparing us for in our ministry.

Although the Lord did many amazing weather interventions after 1987, there were a few times He allowed the rain to fall. One time, it was a staff picnic. I said

to the staff, “We did not get rained out, we got rained in.” The few occasions we did get rain—when I might have taken it for granted or not fasted—motivated deeper introspection before the Lord and evaluation of our lives and ministry. Just as Israel gained spiritual insight through defeat in battle, valuable lessons of humility and obedience were learned through the few times it rained. That 10-year period of weather miracles from 1977 to 1987 was crucial before we built adequate facilities. As the manna provided by the Lord was no longer needed when the Israelites reached the Promised Land, our weather miracles were not as frequently needed after building our facilities but still continued to occur.

God's Provision



Karen and I do not own a home or a vehicle, have a very small retirement fund and have lived on faith for over 45 years; yet, the God in whom we trust wholeheartedly has always met our needs—often in some miraculous ways. The following pages highlight just a few of God's many “financial interventions.” There have been far too many to record them all.

Since our ministry's beginning in 1977, we have truly been a faith ministry, dependent on the Lord's provision through ministry partners. Many times it seemed impossible to meet all the needs, but God has always been faithful. On numerous occasions, the Lord let us go to the last day and sometimes to the very last hour, but He always intervened and met our needs so that every bill was paid, and funds were not wasted by paying interest on borrowed money.

Tried to Force Loans

In 1985, a new Board member tried to force the ministry to take out loans to be “successful” and to develop a “credit rating” in case we would ever need to borrow money. I told him and the Board of Directors that I believed paying interest was contrary to God's will for this ministry. He said that he had a very successful business, and we must run this ministry like a business to be successful—meaning we must borrow money from a bank. I told him I disagreed but would submit if the Board chose to do so in the future, all the while trusting the Lord to intervene if this was not what He wanted.

Within a few months, his successful business began to have serious financial troubles. The Lord taught him that you do not run ministries (at least our ministry) like a business. He said, “You have something wonderful, Bill, keep walking by faith!”

\$1,300 Short

While in Hong Kong in February 1990, on my way home from my second India Outreach, the Lord was already making arrangements to provide the funds we needed to cover the cost of the trip. When I called to check in at the ministry, Ellis Stewart told me that Pastor Guy Bongiovanni had called about me speaking in Boston at a large youth rally in March, one month after I would get home. I told Ellis Stewart to let him know that I would.

When all the bills came in from our time of ministry in India, we were about \$1,300 short and did not know how the Lord would provide for it. I received a call from Boston that they were going to pay the airfare for Karen and me, but when I discovered how expensive it was, I said, "That's too much. It's only a 12-hour drive. We'll just drive and bring Tabitha and BJ, too." He said they would still give me the amount of the airfare for Karen and me, plus an offering for the ministry. The total I received for everything after our travel expenses were covered was approximately \$1,300!

A House Provides A Van

The Lord has provided several ministry vehicles throughout the years in some extraordinary ways. Seeking Him for the right vehicle and then trusting Him to supply the funds without paying interest has been an exciting venture of faith. The following is just one of many examples I could cite.

The ministry's vehicle was rapidly heading for retirement, and we were hoping to get a van. It seemed impossible to raise the necessary funds, but the Lord encouraged us to trust Him and to persevere.

As the months went by, numerous individuals and churches donated over \$4,000—but that was still far from being enough. Many people asked, "Are you ever going to get your van?" I assured them the Lord would provide all the necessary finances to purchase a much-needed ministry van. In our September 1992 newsletter, I stated, "It took us almost two years to raise enough money to get a ministry van back in 1985, but we persevered, and God blessed in a wonderful way. So too, the Lord will provide the necessary finances to purchase a ministry van. In the meantime, we keep trusting and persevering."

In September 1992, Kenneth and Janet Fisher donated a house and two acres of land (in the township of Steuben, Pennsylvania) for us to sell and use the funds to help purchase the van. Kenneth (part Sioux Indian), who was 80 years old at the time, had lived in this house until three years earlier when he married Janet and moved in with her.

Kenneth was not sure what to do with the house and property. He said he woke up in the middle of the night, and the Lord spoke to his heart to give it to Bill Rudge Ministries to be sold to help us purchase the van. In September 1992, the deed was transferred to the ministry.

We hoped to sell the house and property and get the van in the fall of 1992. Michelle, a divorced woman from Texas with two children, and her mother wanted to buy the house but they were unable to secure a loan at that time. Although my attorney, the insurance agent and a bank loan officer advised me not to sell it to Michelle on an Article of Agreement because they thought it would be better to sell it to someone who could buy it outright, I felt the Lord leading me to do so. Furthermore, I did not want to drive a new van when this woman and her family needed a home for the winter. So, I delayed getting the van for six months and, in October, signed an Article of Agreement letting her make payments and giving her until March 31, 1993, to secure a loan.

Michelle made payments totaling \$2,000 during the next six months, but was unable to get a loan for the house by March 31, 1993. So, I gave her an additional two months, but when it was certain that she was unable to get a loan, her own real estate agent found another buyer.

In June 1993, we sold the house for \$14,000 (minus closing expenses). The new buyer, at my request, made an Article of Agreement with Michelle, so she could continue to rent the house. With the income from donations received from individuals, churches and proceeds from the sale of the house, we were ready to begin looking for a ministry van.

Eilene Urmson, treasurer of our ministry, told Tom Brest, the service manager at the time at Austintown Dodge in nearby Ohio, to call me. I told him how we had been raising funds for almost a year and a half and even had a house donated to us. He had the owner of Austintown Dodge, Chuck Eddy, call, so I shared our circumstances with him. A few days later, Chuck called back and said, "I have the van I think you want!"

It was a 1993 Dodge Caravan used as a corporate vehicle with only 10,000 miles on it. The sticker price was \$25,000 but he said he would sell it to us for his cost of \$20,000. Still \$2,000 short, a pastor's wife in New Jersey said the Lord spoke to her heart, and the church her husband pastored filled that gap.

I prayed and pondered for three days then talked to my Board members who agreed to purchase this van. It far exceeded what Karen and I had hoped for or even thought about. We were initially looking to get a used van, but the Lord had other plans. Chuck Eddy was right when he said, "Purchasing this van is an excellent stewardship of the Lord's money."

It had taken 16 months to raise the funds, but because we sought His will and persevered in faith, the Lord was faithful. The timing was perfect to get the van because our first long driving trip (to Washington, D.C.) in many months was coming up in a few days, and we did not know if our current vehicle would make it. Then, two weeks later, I would be driving to New Jersey to speak.

It was a big step of faith in June 1993 to purchase this van and also start construction on a garage and outside pavilion because July and August were usually our lowest months financially. However, we knew we were not being

presumptuous, but acting in obedience to the Spirit's leading.

Free Airline Tickets

On our way home after speaking at Fort Stewart, Georgia, (March 2000) Karen and I were bumped, and we were provided with two free airline tickets. Then over Christmas that year Karen and I were due to minister in San Diego. We used two free tickets, but on different airlines: Karen on Delta and me on Northwest.

We were scheduled to fly back to Pennsylvania on December 31. My flight on Northwest was cancelled so they rescheduled me on January 1 and gave me a free room at the Holiday Inn by the Bay, \$50 in food vouchers, and a free airline ticket. Karen's flight on Delta was overbooked, so Karen was given a \$250 voucher and rescheduled to fly on January 1. We stayed at the hotel together, enjoying a New Year's Eve dinner and fireworks in downtown San Diego for a cost to us of only \$25.

I went to the airport the morning of January 1 and, due to overbooking, I was given a \$500 voucher, 2,000 free miles, and rescheduled to first class on a 10:30 p.m. red-eye flight. Karen went to her January 1, 1:10 p.m. flight, which was also overbooked, so she received a \$220 voucher and a \$10 food voucher.

Our ministry volunteers and friends in California knew we had little money, but saw how the Lord blessed us with free tickets and a wonderful New Year's Eve. God is good! Over the years we have received more than 25 free airline tickets by volunteering to be bumped.

The Blessing of Lost Luggage

In April 2002, I was scheduled to speak at Maxwell Air Force Base (for the second time) and had two services at Prattville CMA Church, both in Montgomery, Alabama. Our flight out of Pittsburgh early Saturday afternoon included two layovers. Somewhere between Pittsburgh, Detroit and Memphis, the luggage containing my suit and tie, personal items, and a large box of ministry books and audio tapes, did not make it to Montgomery when we landed.

Major Mastriano, his wife and son took us to Walmart about 9:30 p.m. to buy dress pants and a few essentials. Sunday morning, while I spoke at Maxwell AFB, Major Mastriano went to the airport. The only part of our luggage to arrive was the box of literature and audio messages. From Maxwell, I was taken to Prattville CMA where the service was already in progress. As I walked in, the pastor immediately introduced me. A woman who heard me speak there eight months earlier had obtained many of my books and audio messages. She stood and asked to say something, telling the congregation what an impact my materials had made on her life and the lives of those to whom she gave them. All of the people in the pew where she was sitting were there because they had come to Christ after reading one of my books or listening to one of my messages.

The response to my ministry at both Maxwell AFB and Prattville CMA was excellent and the distribution of the books and tapes went amazingly well. When Karen and I returned to Montgomery airport on Monday morning to fly back to Pittsburgh, the rest of our luggage still had not arrived and airport representatives had no idea where it was. Marcus, the Northwest Airlines representative in Montgomery, gave each of us \$100 in vouchers for future travel since “we had been so nice.” He also informed me that Northwest would send a check for the Walmart purchases.

Manuel, at Northwest headquarters in Minneapolis, said that since we were “embarrassed” before the military, he authorized 20,000 miles for both of our world perk accounts, which gave each of us a free airline ticket.

When our luggage was delivered a couple of days later to our house in Pennsylvania, the person delivering it gave us another \$25 travel voucher for our inconvenience. I sent Marcus in Alabama a thank you note along with my *Reaching Your Maximum Potential* book and T-shirt. He called a few days later to thank me.

An apparent obstacle was overcome through prayer, faith and a good attitude. Instead of hindering our ministry, it turned out to be a great blessing (reimbursed finances, free airline tickets, and an opportunity to be a witness for the Lord). You never know what the Lord is doing, so trust Him to “work all things together for good.” Honor Him, even when it seems impossible!

\$1,865 Check from the Hamiltons

Karen and I were taken to Eat’n Park by Jean Turose after the service at Sharon Alliance Church in 2004. Sitting near us were Pastor and Mrs. William Hamilton, retired from another denomination. After Jean left, Karen and I sat down with the Hamiltons. Knowing they were on a very limited income, Karen and I picked up their bill (about \$18.00), without them knowing.

Lois, our financial secretary, told me two weeks later that we had not received enough money in the mail to pay all the ministry bills when a check was personally delivered to the ministry center from David and Debbie Hamilton, son and daughter-in-law of Pastor and Mrs. Hamilton. The amount of the check was \$1,865.00. The Lord used David and Debbie without their knowledge (they had not been told about the \$18.00) to bless the ministry a hundredfold. Truly, the Lord is faithful, and His timing is always perfect.

I saw David Hamilton at Buchanan’s gas station that same day and told him about this. He was overwhelmed with emotion and tears came to his eyes as we talked of God’s faithfulness and how the Lord used him and his wife to meet the ministry needs that day.

On March 10, 2005, Karen and I flew to San Diego. Kc Hutter, owner of Dirt Cheap Car Rental, provided a free rental car while we were there. Kc also gave us a card with some money enclosed to help with ministry expenses and Karen's two-week treatment at the Optimum Health Institute.

Despite a note included in Kc's card inviting us to visit with her and her husband Jerry, the program at the Optimum Health Institute was so intense that we had no time even to call. However, on March 23rd, I felt strongly impressed by the Lord to get in touch. Karen said that we should wait until the end of the week since the sessions each day kept us so busy. However, I told her I felt it had to be now.

Upon calling Dirt Cheap Car Rental, I was told that Kc was not there because Jerry was at Scripps Hospital in La Jolla with heart problems. Karen and I went to the hospital immediately. We arrived at Jerry's room about 12:30 p.m., and he was scheduled for heart surgery at 1:00 p.m. Earlier, a hospital employee had asked Jerry if he wanted a minister or chaplain. Jerry responded that he did not need one because he had his Bible, and the Lord would send someone. He was elated when Karen and I walked in! We had a great time of sharing and prayer before Jerry went to surgery. The surgery went flawlessly, and Jerry recovered amazingly well.

After completing our time at the Optimum Health Institute and our ministry schedule in California, I dropped off the car. Jerry had left a box for me with a leather Bible inside. Written inside the Bible was the following note: "Thanks for listening to the Lord and being in my hospital room at just the appointed time." Tucked throughout the pages of the Bible that Jerry gave me were 5, 10 and 20 dollar bills—almost the exact amount needed to pay the additional bills for Karen's alternative cancer treatments that would come due when we arrived back home in Pennsylvania. The Lord is so good and so faithful!

Receiving that Bible from Jerry reminded me of an incident that occurred when I was a child. My dad said he would give me five dollars to read *The Bible In Pictures*. Five dollars was a lot of money back then, so I did it. When I completed reading it several months later, I asked for the five dollars. My dad either did not have the money to give me or he realized that paying me to read the Bible was wrong. Whatever his motivation, his response was, "You gained more than five dollars from reading the Bible." Of course, he was right, but I did not discover that until many years later.

The Lord used Jerry's Bible to make it up to me though, plus much more. It is a good thing I love to read the Bible now, or I might have never discovered the blessings inside. So, too, God has much more than a material blessing for us inside His Word. Open it today and begin reading because it is filled with riches beyond compare.

Vehicle

I had been wanting to attend the Hallelujah Acres Health Minister training program for more than a year, but my schedule and limited finances prohibited it. However, God's timing and ways are always perfect.

In the summer of 2006, I put in my schedule the date for the November 13-18, 2006, Health Minister training (Get Healthy! Stay Balanced program on November 13-15 and Health Minister training November 15-18, 2006). I still was not sure how the Lord would make it possible, but in faith, I trusted Him to accomplish what He had put in my heart. I had been following the principles of their program for years and felt great. My wife, who had been diagnosed with cancer in 2004 has since then been following many of the principles of the Hallelujah Diet and has been doing wonderfully without taking chemotherapy or radiation.

In the fall issue of the Hallelujah Acres magazine, I noticed that they had scholarships for pastors and ministers. Following our phone conversation, Pastor McCluney, Church Health Minister Coordinator, graciously offered me and my wife a tuition-free scholarship. However, we would have to provide our own lodging and transportation.

It just so happened that my nephew Rich Miller and his wife, Sunday, recently sold their house in San Diego and bought a historical house in York, South Carolina, less than 30 minutes from Hallelujah Acres, which is located in Shelby, North Carolina. My nephew and his wife had been praying for someone to stay at their house to feed their dog and cat while they were back in San Diego from November 13-20—the exact dates we needed a place to stay. So the Lord provided free lodging in a beautiful and peaceful environment and added another blessing which was the use of their vehicle. (Hotel rooms near Hallelujah were at least \$50 a night, and a car rental was about \$300 a week.)

The timing proved to be perfect. On Sunday, November 13, I finished a speaking engagement in Pennsylvania and was able to make it to the Pittsburgh airport just in time for our flight to Charlotte, North Carolina. My nephew left the next morning for his flight to San Diego, and we went on to Hallelujah Acres in time for orientation.

The Lord provided another unexpected blessing. A pastor friend, Will Cline, whom I had not seen in many years, was pastoring Mizpah Baptist Church in Camden, South Carolina, only two hours from where we were staying. When I called to let him know that I was going to be in his area, he was elated and invited me to speak on Sunday morning, November 19. He said he had been praying for months about having me come and speak. The service was fantastic and over 400 of our books and audio tapes were gratefully received by those attending. The pastor called me more than a week later to say the people were still excited about the message.

At the end of the week, we parked our nephew's Jeep in long-term parking at

the airport on Sunday evening the 19th, so his wife could pick it up on Monday the 20th when she returned to South Carolina. In the hustle and bustle to get to the airport on time, I realized at the gate that I had forgotten to leave the parking ticket in the Jeep. Without the ticket, she would have to pay a large parking fee, so I jumped on a shuttle bus and headed back to long-term parking as Karen remained at our gate. The Jeep was locked with the keys in it, so I stuck the parking ticket inside the little door above the gas cap. I made it back to the airport in enough time to join Karen for our flight back home.

Truly, the Lord is amazing and always faithful as every detail in what previously appeared to be an impossible trip became a great blessing.

The Timing of Ten Thousand

Funds had been exceptionally tight at the ministry. We needed about \$5,000 for the new *Not Our Father's Faith* book to be published, and about \$1,500 for ministry vehicle repairs. In addition, we were facing a waterline leak repair (about \$1,400), plus the usual ministry expenses.

On September 9, 2009, an unexpected check (the largest in the ministry's history to that date) for \$10,000 arrived. It was from a former sergeant in the U.S. Army and his wife who heard me speak at a military base in Germany. Excerpts of their challenging and inspiring letter follow:

Thanks be to God for His indescribable Gift! That Gift is the Gift that God gave to the whole world—His Son, Jesus Christ! (2 Corinthians 9:15)

In these last days, the heart of God is crying out to get His Good News—the pure, incorruptible Word—into every heart, every tribe, every tongue and every nation.

Bill and Karen, we know that God is using you powerfully in these last days to get the Word around the world. We are divesting from this world which is fading away and investing in the Kingdom that cannot be shaken, the Kingdom of God.

This is a one-time offering because it's from savings, but we'd rather invest it in saving the world! We love you guys, and this is such a blessing to be able to give back to the LORD after all He's done for us!

What a joy it will be to worship the LORD forever with the people from every tribe, tongue and nation, as in Revelation 5:8-14! All glory be unto God!

Please dedicate this special offering of \$10,000 to getting the Gospel of Jesus Christ around the world to every nation as you are able. Thank you so much!

Also, if matching funds could be encouraged or applied to multiply the gift, that would be so great! Encourage people to match up to \$10,000 in

donations dedicated to reaching the world while we still can.

Praise the LORD indeed! It was such a blessing to be able to do—and it was the greatest joy of our hearts!

Thank you so very much for sharing the gospel of Jesus Christ with the world! The smile on Jesus' face is the greatest blessing! We want it just to be for God's glory and Jesus' smile! Thank you so much for your ministry! Lots of love!

The timing of this generous check was truly of the Lord. In 2009 we were able to donate more than 10,000 of our books and audio messages to missions around the world. Our faithful supporters and ministry friends enabled us to match this \$10,000 by early 2010, and we were able to donate more than 10,000 additional copies of our books and audio messages to touch countless lives throughout the world.

The \$65 Bottle of Water

In August 2014, Ray Delgros cut down a tree at the ministry. He did not charge us, but said his friend Jim would remove the stump. Jim agreed to do it at a reduced rate of \$65. When he finished, I brought him a check and a cold bottle of water. Jim took the water and looked at it very carefully. I thought maybe he did not like the brand of water. Then, Jim said, "This bottle of water is worth \$65." Bewildered, I asked, "What do you mean?" Jim stated that, while he was removing the stump, he felt God was telling him not to charge the ministry anything. So he said to God, "If you really are leading me not to charge the \$65, have Bill bring me out a bottle of water."

Unexpected "Miracles"

No news from Karen is good news regarding ministry finances! However, on Wednesday, October 31, 2018, Karen informed me that we needed \$1,163 from Emergency Funds to cover October's remaining expenses. Since we had to leave for Franklin, Pennsylvania, for the District 10 Girls' Soccer Championship (BJ was coaching), we were unable to get to the bank before closing. No one knew of this need except Karen and me. Halfway to Franklin, I received a call from Betty, a good friend of the ministry. She shared in a follow-up e-mail:

It was about the middle of October when I was looking for a card for my granddaughter at the store. Bill and Karen's son, BJ, walked by me and gently tapped me on the shoulder and said hello. I replied, "Hello" and after a few other words, we went our separate ways. It remained with me that just the simple gesture of a touch on the shoulder can be so meaningful. It made me want to show the same kindness to others.

At the end of October, I was sorting money that is received from the sale of snacks and drinks at our workplace. I usually never have time to roll

the loose coins but was able to this time. While sorting and wrapping the coins, I felt God speak to me that I needed to take the box of coins and money to Bill Rudge. Keep in mind it was after 3:00 p.m. and I had a busy evening ahead. I thought about taking it the next day, but felt God urge me to take it that evening. It was after 4:00 p.m. when I got to the ministry, and it was closed. I called Bill's cell phone and reached him and Karen as they were driving to Franklin.

I explained why I was calling. We were interrupted several times due to poor reception but by then I was determined to finish my mission as God instructed me. Bill informed me that they did have a special need to end the month but would not tell me the amount. I placed the money box in a secure location Bill advised me to use and prayed it would help toward the deficiency they were facing for October. I honestly did not believe there would be enough money in the box, but God knew and whether God multiplied it overnight I do not know.

I was driving the next morning when Bill called to inform me how much was in the box (\$1,177) so I pulled my car over to the side of the road and I am glad I did. Bill explained exactly how much was needed (\$1,163) and that there was \$14.00 left over towards November. God never ceases to amaze me! HE knows all and there is no coincidence with the timeline of events leading up to this. I am thankful I could help Bill and that I listened and followed God's urging. I encourage everyone to be obedient to God's call.

This "miracle" would have never happened if Betty were not sensitive and obedient to God's Spirit, or if all our other ministry supporters had not previously sent in their donations (both large and small). A heartfelt thanks to all of you for your generous, faithful and sacrificial giving!

Many More

Many other times throughout the years, people who had no idea about a specific need beforehand or did not know about a desperate situation we were facing were, obviously, sensitive and obedient to the Lord in giving the exact amount needed at just the right time. It is equally awesome to consider how the Lord has brought to this ministry some of the exact staff needed at just the right time to fulfill specific needs.

God's Faithfulness



Countless times the Lord has faithfully aligned the circumstances to accomplish His will and purpose in our lives and ministry. The following are highlights of just a few of them. Many more illustrations are spread throughout the pages of various books I have written, as well as recorded in my journals.

WWII Jewish Marine Accepts Jesus

In 1971, I was working at a quick lube place (Pit Stop) changing oil. I made sure every car had a tract on its dashboard before it left. One day, after changing the oil and putting a tract on the dashboard, the man drove out and when he saw the tract, he was livid. He turned off his engine and came back in screaming, "Who put this tract in my car? I am a Jew. I do not want to hear about Jesus!" After he was done yelling, he got back in his car, but it would not start.

A few years later, his younger daughter accepted Jesus Christ as her Messiah through my wife's witnessing and became one of our first staff members. We did not realize until later that it was her father who had yelled at me years earlier.

He listened in on a conversation between Karen and his daughter as they talked about Jesus. Karen remembers him interrupting the call and yelling, "You will see when the Messiah comes, He will not have nail prints in His hands!" A few years later, while attending a church service with her sister, his oldest daughter had a vision of the Messiah. His hands were stretched out, and she saw nail prints in them. She also accepted Yeshua (Jesus) as her Savior and Lord.

Exactly 40 years after the Pit Stop incident, I had an opportunity to visit him in the hospital. He received me warmly, probably not remembering me as the guy from Pit Stop. Of course, I never mentioned it. I prayed for him in Yeshua's name and was invited to visit him in his home after he got out of the hospital.

When I walked into his house, he extended his hand and said, "You are my friend." He told me he was a Marine during World War II and had killed people, and he knew that it is not right to take another person's life. He asked God for forgiveness.

I shared about the love and forgiveness of the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. I talked about the messianic prophecies in the Hebrew Bible fulfilled by Yeshua and the ones that will be fulfilled when Yeshua returns and sets up His millennial kingdom. Before leaving, I once again prayed in Yeshua's name, and he invited me to come back anytime. I had several more opportunities to share with him and his Jewish wife. They both listened intently as the Hebrew Scriptures and New Testament clearly revealed Yeshua as the Jewish Messiah, and they were given hope concerning Heaven and eternity.

Forty years earlier, he cursed me for even mentioning that name, and forty years later, he allowed me to pray for him and proclaim salvation in Jesus' name.

You're the One!

In 1977, Karen and I attended Linda Bongiovanni's wedding. By the time we arrived, the church was already full, so we had to stand in the back. While feeling somewhat awkward and conspicuous, Dave Chiodo turned, looked at me and said, "You're the one!" I said, "The one for what?" He replied, "The one to take over our radio program."

They had been praying for someone to take over Rita Chiodo's program on WPIC because she was moving. When Dave saw me standing in the back, he said the Lord instantly spoke to his heart that I was the one. Thus, began what was to become our international radio ministry.

I knew nothing of radio but said, "I'll give it a try." At first, I used facilities at the church and then received permission to use WPIC after hours—usually after midnight. The program director of that station, Jeff Tobin, came to know the Lord. He volunteered his time and talents as the voice on our radio broadcast intros and outros for many years.

Eventually, Bob Gillet, a retired technical engineer, donated his services to design and install a radio production studio at our ministry center. Bob rarely donated his services to any church or ministry, but because he felt we were truly legitimate, he donated thousands of dollars' worth of services, equipment and supplies. Alice, Bruce, June and many other volunteers helped in a variety of ways with radio broadcasts and producing thousands of audio tapes to fulfill requests from our listeners.

A Vision Only God Could Fulfill

In 1977, at the very beginning of Bill Rudge Ministries, the Lord placed a goal and vision in my heart that within five years, the ministry would be reaching out

nationally and, in ten years, internationally. There was no possibility of fulfilling this vision of national and international ministry on my own—especially considering our current circumstances. I waited until January 1979 to even send out a letter describing this vision the Lord had placed in my heart. I filed a copy of the letter and then forgot about it in the busyness of my local ministry.

Within five years, the Lord opened doors so that I was on radio stations and speaking across the U.S. Then, a tremendous international opportunity came in 1987 (ten years after the start of the ministry): broadcasting on our first radio station outside the United States, the Caribbean Beacon. Soon thereafter, our program was on other overseas stations (before streaming radio broadcasts over the internet was available). We quickly began to receive letters from around the world requesting our books, pamphlets and audio messages.

The Lord used a man from India to be the catalyst to also help move the ministry beyond the United States to the world. In 1986, Gabriel Massey, General Secretary of the Federation of Evangelical Churches of India, was speaking in the U.S. We had never met or even heard of each other before. Gabriel just happened to be in a hotel room in Youngstown, Ohio. He could not sleep that night because, as he said, “The angels were disturbing my sleep.” So, he scanned the radio dial for a Christian station until he came across my broadcast. The Holy Spirit spoke to him that “this man must come to India to minister.”

Gabriel returned to India and wrote me, requesting that I come and speak for their national convention in September 1987. Unable to go at that time because Karen had major surgery in June of 1987, I sent a representative. It was also in 1987—ten years from the beginning of the ministry—that through a series of traumatic experiences (described in detail in my “Strength Through Weakness” booklet), Satan came close to stopping the fulfillment of that vision, but the Lord intervened and brought the victory.

In December 1987, Gabriel was speaking in the U.S. once again, so he contacted me and asked me again to come and speak in India. Such was the beginning of my “adventures in missions” which would take me on many exciting, and oftentimes dangerous, ministry trips to India, the Himalayas, Haiti, the West Indies, South America, Canada, Europe, Africa, Asia and the Middle East.

Looking back, it is amazing how the Lord brought about the fulfillment of the goals and vision He gave me in the beginning of our ministry in 1977 when we were using our kitchen table for a desk. Then, we had little hope of survival—let alone one day having a growing national and international outreach ministry. How awesome and amazing He is! God used Gabriel and the Caribbean Beacon to open doors to begin our international outreach. Gabriel wrote me a letter in 2022 in which he stated, “I still remember that cold late evening when I heard you on the radio and contacted you.”

Desire for Military Service Fulfilled God's Way

The Bible says that God gives us the desires of our hearts. In 1990, my ministry took on a camouflage hue. Because of opportunities initially opened by Doug and Debbie Mastriano, I have had the opportunity to speak to thousands of Army, Navy, Air Force, Marine Corps and Coast Guard personnel at military bases and ceremonies throughout the United States and overseas.

I have spent many weeks living on military bases, working out with military personnel in their gyms and obstacle courses. After speaking engagements, I always take time to talk, counsel or pray with enlisted men and women, officers, and their spouses and children. Our ministry has provided military personnel and their families with thousands of free books and audio messages we have produced. I also have had the opportunity to impact the lives of new recruits preparing for boot camp by training them on the Ultimate Challenge Obstacle Course at our ministry center.

In a roundabout way, I am performing my military service and doing my “tour of duty” I never completed in my younger years.

Karen's Tumor Returns and Bill's Melanoma

I was writing the book, *Who Is This Jesus?* which, along with our “Reaching Your Maximum Potential” shirts and witness cards, proved to be an effective way to reach New Agers for Christ.

Karen had been having some minor pain in her lower stomach following her surgery in June 1987, but after our accident in Oregon (July 1988), it had become more severe. When we were just about ready to print the *Who Is This Jesus?* book, Karen went to Dr. Henwood, and he ordered an ultrasound. We thought Karen had another tumor but would not know the results for two more weeks. To make matters worse, we were still paying off her 1987 surgery and had not been able to get insurance yet. It also looked like I might have melanoma, a skin cancer.

The Lord gave me the hope that this time we would both be all right and this is just spiritual warfare because of the book, but this battle we will win! He gave me the illustration of the disciples in the boat (Mark 4:36-41). Right when it appeared hopeless and they would perish, He intervened, just as He would do in this situation.

After the ultrasound, I questioned the technician and was told, “There’s definitely something there.” I said, “Karen, the report seems like defeat, but the Lord has given me a hope to supersede what they said. And that hope is that this time everything will work out!”

Two days before the results from the doctor, the Lord strongly impressed me to go on a two-day fast concerning this situation. At the exact time of Karen’s appointment, our staff prayed at the ministry center. It appeared certain from the

circumstances that Karen would need some kind of surgery or at least extensive treatment, but by faith, we trusted the Lord.

As soon as Dr. Henwood saw us, he immediately said that everything was fine with Karen and that her pain was probably from the bursting of a cyst from the car accident. There was no tumor, and no further treatment was necessary. As for me, he said the pathology report was negative, and I did not have melanoma. Once again, God honored and fulfilled what He had spoken to my heart in advance.

Mark Oss Takes Over Radio Production

On Monday, March 23, 1998, I intended to spend the day in the radio studio preparing for Bruce Adams to come in on Wednesday to do the intros and outros and duplicate the broadcasts for the various stations. However, the equipment was malfunctioning. Bob Gillet, the engineer who installed and maintained the equipment, had died, and Ron, who had been helping in his absence, was having serious health issues.

I was fasting that day, so I spent extra time in the prayer room reminding the Lord how He had always somehow helped us prepare the radio broadcasts. So, I asked Him to please resolve the equipment problem. I went back into the studio, but the problem was still there. After several attempts to find and solve the problem, I went into the prayer room a second time. Still no resolution. A third time I went into the prayer room saying, "Lord, I need Your help! What am I to do?" I tried the equipment again, but it still did not work.

While messing with the tape reels, I received a phone call from Mark Oss. Mark works at Focus on the Family as an engineer and several months previously had begun to edit and produce my audio messages. I had not heard from Mark for several months, but the moment I was completing my fast and pondering what to do about the radio broadcasts because of the defective equipment, Mark called to see if I needed any production done. Truly, the Lord is faithful!

I said, "Mark, I have been fasting all day and prayed three times for the equipment in our radio production studio which is not working. I am ready to turn the complete production of my radio ministry over to you." Mark responded, "I think I can do it." After a few more days of prayer by both of us, we agreed to do it, and Mark has been doing our radio broadcasts and audio messages ever since.

Miracle in the Midst of Mayhem

Several years ago, the Rainbow Family was having their annual gathering at the Allegheny National Forest, an expansive national park in the mountains of northern Pennsylvania. One of my staff, Jim Weikal, and I spent the majority of Friday, July 2, 1999, witnessing and passing out books and pamphlets to some of

the 20,000 people who were involved in a smorgasbord of New Age beliefs, Eastern mysticism, Shamanism, Native American religions and various other forms of occultism, as well as some drug use. Most of them were friendly and receptive.

Two days later on the Fourth of July, I went back alone. The massive encampment of 20,000 people was spread out over many wooded acres involving hundreds of trails. Upon arriving at the Allegheny National Forest, I turned into the area set aside for this gathering. I wore a tie-dyed shirt and a bandanna. I picked up three "hippies" and gave them a ride for about 10 miles on a dirt road. After dropping them off, I realized I was not where I wanted to be, so I turned around. At that point, another "hippie" asked for a ride.

I asked him where he was going, and he responded, "I don't know. I am trying to find someone." He told me that he had driven approximately seven hours from Cincinnati, Ohio, to find a co-worker—a young man whose father had just died. He happened to be the only person who knew that the 20-year-old had hitchhiked with his dog to this Rainbow gathering. Becoming aware of the immensity of the event, he was simply overwhelmed. He had slept in his car the night before and had no idea where or how to begin. I told him the reason I was there and offered to help, saying that only the Lord would be able to assist in finding this "needle in a haystack."

Cars were only allowed up to certain checkpoints, but because of the nature of our search, we were allowed to drive further than most. Even so, after driving another five miles down dirt roads, we finally had to park the car and walk. We passed several trails. There was a slight problem hindering us in communicating about our search. The morning of July 4th was their time of silent meditation—a quiet time to "honor and respect all those who have aided the positive evolution of earth and humankind." The entire camp was hushed, and people were gathered in the Main Circle to meditate for world peace and the healing of the earth, so we could not talk out loud to anyone and had to speak to each other in hushed words.

After leading him to a spacious area where the silent meditation ceremony was focused and telling him that this was as far as I could take him, he suddenly turned around and exclaimed, "There he is!" The 20-year-old we were searching for in the midst of 20,000 people was seated not even four feet from us. He told him, "You have to come home with me." With a perplexed look, the young man asked, "Why?" He was told that his father had passed away. As he gathered his belongings and his dog to leave, I said, "What you saw today was a miracle! Only the Lord could have helped us find you." My co-searcher said, "Without a doubt!" I gave them my *Reaching Your Maximum Potential in Christ* book and "Searching" pamphlet which they gladly received.

Among 20,000 people, down miles of dirt roads and numerous trails past hundreds of encampments, He guided us to the exact spot where that young man was sitting. I have seen God do these kinds of things over and over again. Truly,

He is amazing!

Blitz the World 2000

During a time of prayer and fasting in January 2000, I had a burden from the Lord to blitz the world that year through speaking engagements, radio broadcasts, books and audio tapes. While the ministry touched many lives during 2000, the year was rapidly coming to an end, and I did not feel that all the Lord had spoken to my heart was fulfilled. This was partly because I was diverted with the sale of the ministry center, construction of new facilities and limited funds.

While discussing this with Karen sometime in October, the Lord spoke to my heart, "You will fulfill it." Amazingly, the third week of December 2000, a dramatization of my testimony was aired on *Unshackled*, one of the longest-running radio dramas in history, and was heard on more than 1,200 radio stations worldwide (approximately 984 stations in the United States and 222 foreign stations). They have also translated my testimony into several other languages which are available in their archive records.

The Lord fulfilled what He had spoken to my heart and enabled my ministry to blitz the world in an even greater way than I anticipated—He waited until the end of 2000. The Lord does not always do things as I expect or when I would like, but He is always faithful!

Answered Prayers (Carson)

Early on during our daughter Tabitha's second pregnancy, her doctor discovered a cyst. Several sonograms and examinations confirmed a mass the size of a tennis ball. Her doctor in San Diego was concerned because it was growing so rapidly. Extensive surgery was planned if the mass did not stop growing. Thankfully, the last two sonograms revealed the mass had not grown. So, Tabitha was able to carry the baby full term without having surgery before delivery.

Numerous people and churches in Pennsylvania, California, Ohio, Michigan, Florida and throughout the U.S. were praying and fasting that Tabitha would not need the surgery, the mass would not be cancerous and that it would disappear by the time she gave birth.

On Tuesday, October 23, 2001, after more than 30 hours of labor, a cesarean section was performed. Tabitha delivered a healthy baby boy, Carson, weighing 7 pounds, 7 ounces and measuring 20 inches long. One of the reasons the doctor opted for a c-section was so the medical staff could deal with the mass right after delivery. However, when they thoroughly searched for the mass, it had "disappeared." One of the baffled doctors said, "The mysterious mass is gone."

We thank the Lord for honoring the prayers and cries of His people and also thank all those who prayed for Tabitha during this pregnancy which ended in a great victory and testimony for the Lord.

We give thanks to the Lord for all He does in our lives!

Miracle Child (Lillian Grace)

My daughter Tabitha Rudge Smith wrote the following account.

My husband and I were living in California and always wanted a big family. When we learned a third child was going to join us, we were thrilled. I called the doctor and was told, “We would like to see you around 10 to 12 weeks in the pregnancy unless you have complications.”

I made my appointment to see the doctor for the first time when I knew I would be able to hear my baby’s heartbeat. In addition, my morning sickness was so bad with this pregnancy that I could not wait to see the doctor to get something to help alleviate it.

At the appointment, I saw a female doctor who tried to hear the heartbeat but could not find it. “Sometimes, this early—around 10 weeks—the heartbeat is hard to hear. Instead, we’re going to do an ultrasound.”

How exciting, I thought, I can see my baby as well as hear it! That did not happen. When they did the ultrasound, the woman looked very solemn and said, “I am very sorry. There is a pregnancy sac, but it is empty.” Then, she added, “There are no signs of life.”

I answered, “Well, it is early, and I could be off a few days.”

She looked at me and declared, “Well, you’d have to be off at least 3 weeks.”

In my heart, I knew I was not 3 weeks off of my cycle. Her next words cut me to the core, “Why don’t you go home and think about what you want to do—miscarry on your own or have a D&C?”

That weekend I had planned on going on a women’s retreat. I did not feel like going. My husband suggested, “Why don’t you go to help keep your mind off all this?”

I went. By the second night of the retreat, I was so miserable from throwing up and crying that I had to leave during the evening message and run to the restroom.

A sweet, elderly lady asked sympathetically, “Do you have the flu?”

Do I tell her? I contemplated for a minute, then decided I did not feel like discussing it. Instead, I told her, “I am pregnant and having a terrible time with morning sickness.”

Taking my hand, she asked, “May I pray for you?”

I just need to tell her that there is no baby. Why pray? I agreed, though. She continued to hold my hand and pray, asking God to take away my nausea, bless my pregnancy and then she placed her hand on my womb and said,

“Lord, if there is something that needs to be in the womb that is not there, we ask you to place it there.”

At that moment, I burst into tears and told her the whole story. She simply smiled, hugged me, then walked away.

A few days later, I went to see the doctor who said, “I’ll schedule one more ultrasound before scheduling your D&C.” When she placed the ultrasound wand on my stomach, she seemed amazed. She not only heard the heartbeat but saw a picture of our 11-week-old baby in my belly.

We knew that God had performed a miracle and gave us our precious baby. She is now a beautiful, healthy young woman.

Tragedy to Triumph

On the forty-fourth anniversary (July 5, 2007) of my brother Jeffrey’s tragic death, I had a grandson born who strongly resembled him. A day filled with sad memories on which I would often return to the West Hill and reflect on what happened in 1963 was replaced with rejoicing and a birthday celebration.

The day of my grandson’s birth, I went to the cemetery, fell on my knees by Jeffrey’s gravestone and thanked God for giving us Lucas William Rudge and praised God for His faithfulness. The umbilical cord had been wrapped around Lucas’ neck, and he could have died if his birth had been delayed.

Then, I did one of the hardest things I have ever done, I thanked God for taking Jeffrey because I knew the tragedy of his death was the catalyst that eventually brought me and all of my family (parents, siblings, son and daughter, grandchildren, nieces and nephews and other relatives and friends) to know the Lord Jesus Christ. Since then, I have fallen on my knees at Jeffrey’s gravesite many times on July 5 to thank God for His faithfulness. Our suffering in this life is not worthy to be compared to all that we will gain for eternity (Romans 8:18).

In God’s graciousness, many years later, He allowed me to meet a man who told me he was in the ambulance that took Jeffrey to the hospital. Another person informed me that she was working in the emergency room that day. Both affirmed they did everything possible to save his life. After I spoke at South Pymatuning Community Church, Diane Kaiser Crumbacher told me that she was six years old and riding in a car behind the one that hit Jeffrey. At my request, she sent the following account:

A snapshot in my mind: I was a young child of 6 years of age. I was out with my mom and sister. We were heading down West State Street in Sharon. Suddenly, I saw a small child get hit by a car. I watched in horror as his tiny body flew up in the air and then hit the road. My mom and sister let out blood-curdling screams. I started to cry. I was so scared and so upset. I did not understand the impact this would have on me. My sister was driving. My mom was in the passenger seat, and I was leaning

over the front seat, talking to them when we witnessed the accident. My sister missed our turn as we got closer to the accident. They knew it was not good. As the weeks and even months passed, I asked my mom what happened to that little boy. No one would tell me. Finally, one of the neighborhood kids told me that the little boy had died.

One day while Bill was preaching, he was telling the story of his brother getting hit by a car and how it impacted his family. The snapshot in my mind of that day came flooding back. Our minds are funny things. They protect us. Even years later, I still can see that snapshot in my mind. My sister confirmed to me that it was Bill's brother we had witnessed being hit by a car. I also talked to my cousin to make sure this was the same boy. Just a snapshot in my mind, but such a major impact in many lives.

After I officiated at a funeral for a mutual friend, Joey Mariano, a friend from my youth told me with tears in his eyes that he will never forget the day my brother was killed. He was delivering papers in our neighborhood, and he heard a terrible loud scream from a woman. I asked him who that woman was, and he replied, "She was your mother."

My mother and oldest brother Larry, who both experienced the trauma of seeing Jeffrey get hit, are now with him and other family members who have gone on to be with the Lord. One day, God's prophetic Word will be forever fulfilled:

DEATH IS SWALLOWED UP in victory. O DEATH, WHERE IS YOUR VICTORY? O DEATH, WHERE IS YOUR STING? (1 Corinthians 15:54-55).

Samantha Rushed to the Hospital

The very day we mailed out our August 2013 newsletter with a feature article on "Divine Protection" (how the Lord has protected our family in many near tragedies), our week-old granddaughter Samantha almost died. On Wednesday, July 31, as she struggled to breathe, Samantha was rushed to Sharon Regional Hospital by ambulance and then taken by ambulance to Pittsburgh Children's Hospital.

Karen and I had just walked back from Giant Eagle when we got the phone call from BJ that Samantha was being rushed to the hospital, and he did not know if she would live. I immediately began a fast (as I always do when facing impossible situations and crises), and we called on the Lord. We left the groceries on the floor and raced to the hospital, praying all the way that she would live.

We beat the ambulance to the hospital and, upon entering, heard one of the nurses say a code red was coming in. We thought Samantha was gone but kept praying.

All the plans and priorities of life we think are important fade and dissipate in circumstances such as this. In times like these, all that matters is the Lord and His

help. He is my strength and my protection and in Him I trust.

God was merciful and spared Samantha's life. We are grateful for the prayers of so many people. After three days at Pittsburgh Children's Hospital, she came home. Life for her brother and sisters and other family members would never be the same as they will always remember this near sting of death and forever realize God is a help to those who call on Him during trouble and tragedy.

Adventures in Missions



First Tour Across the U.S.

One of the technicians from Camfel Productions, who I brought in to do multimedia assemblies for area high schools, took information about my ministry and a copy of my testimony to the youth pastor of the church he attended. The youth pastor invited me to speak at their megachurch in Phoenix in August 1980, so I lined up speaking engagements at churches in Chicago, Dallas and Los Angeles to make what I call a Western Tour, which was instrumental in beginning our national ministry.

Karen, Tabitha and BJ, as well as Karen's great-aunts, Velma and Ella, were with me on the trip. We used it as an inexpensive family "vacation" in between the ministry stops. Karen's parents had just moved to Mesa, Arizona, not far from Phoenix, and it was a blessing to be able to stay with them while we were there.

The Southwest was having a heat wave and dry spell, so many people warned us not to go. The Lord assured us it was His will, and I already knew that the safest place to be is in the center of God's will!

Our van had no air conditioning. We froze water at night and drank it all day long as it melted. Thank the Lord we had no mechanical problems with the van. The ministry opportunities had great responses, and the family had a fantastic time.

Overseas and Around the World

In addition to providing opportunities for me to minister throughout the United States, in 1987 the Lord began to open doors to minister internationally. As a result, He has taken me not only to every state in the U.S., but to more than 25 countries. Many times, the opportunities the Lord has led me to accept seemed impossible to be accomplished. Airline strikes, protests, rioting, coup attempts,

rockets being fired, threats of invasion, severe weather conditions, epidemics, near-tragic accidents, hostile people, potential dangers, life-threatening circumstances and impossible situations stood in the way. However, God always intervened to make the way possible.

Journals of my missionary trips around the world contain records of many adventurous journeys and the miraculous ways God enabled us to take His Gospel to the far reaches of the earth. They are true accounts that have inspired and challenged many people to catch the vision of reaching their world for Christ. Several illustrations of my “adventures in missions” are included in published books such as *Impact Evangelism*, *Overcoming the GIANTS in Your Life* and *Reaching Your Maximum Potential in Christ*.

In this chapter, I will share highlights from just two overseas mission trips—my very first one to the Himalayas of India and my first trip to Africa. All of the other mission trips were equally adventurous and each one impacted innumerable lives for Christ.

The Himalayas

John Delturco, Missions Director for the Christian Church of North America (CCNA), heard me speak at a missions conference in March 1989. He arranged for me to speak at David Dutt’s annual convention in the Himalayan mountains of India.

I met Brother David Dutt at the CCNA National Convention in August 1989. He told me and Karen about some of the riots, burnings and killings going on in the Himalayan mountains where I was scheduled to speak in late November for their international convention. Uncertain whether he was attempting to prepare or scare me, he also told us about python, tiger and wild elephant attacks, as well as the treacherous roads I would have to take up the Himalayas, the highest mountains in the world.

It appeared I would have to go alone on my first speaking tour to India because Karl Holsberg and Tom Werner, who had planned to go with me, were unable to. Although advised not to travel in India alone, because the Lord had led me to go, and because I believe in keeping my word no matter what the cost, I planned to go alone.

A few days later, Rick Chenoweth, a good friend, received our newsletter and felt impressed to go. Rick was able to get his passport amazingly fast, and thereafter, apply for his India visa. BJ also decided he wanted to go, and he already had his passport from our previous trip to the Holy Land.

Then, days later, I was informed by our travel agent, Ruth, from Fellowship Tours in Arizona, that we must book 30 days in advance for the reduced rate and that day happened to be exactly 30 days in advance. The only problem was, only one seat was available to India at a reasonable rate, and if a switch were made to another airline, the fare could almost double.

I called Rick on the phone and said, "Rick, I am sorry. I know you said the Lord told you to go with me, but there's no way you can go. I am going to have to go alone." As I was talking to him, another phone line at the ministry rang. It was our travel agent from Arizona saying, "Bill, I've just talked to some higher-ups in Pan Am, and they said they could get two more tickets for you. You can have three tickets, but that's all the seats that are available at the reduced rates." God was faithful at the last second.

Rick would serve as photographer and teach Bible studies. Both Rick and my son BJ would share Bible stories with the children.

To add to the dilemma and pressure, Ruth, our travel agent, said because Pan Am gave us such a reduced rate, if we missed the plane from Delhi to New York, we would have to buy new tickets and might have to pay up to \$3,000 per person to get flights home. We were told by the duty manager in Delhi, if they were still on strike they could change or cancel our flight from Calcutta back to Delhi at any time. Also, it would take 24 hours by train from Bagdogra to Delhi, making it impossible to get our scheduled flight out of Delhi. In faith and obedience, we went on.

Engineer Strike at Indian Airlines

Brother Dutt called me from India at 8:00 p.m. on November 20, 1989, a few days before my flight was supposed to leave to be there for the convention. He said, "Bill, we have problems in India. We have elections and there's rioting in Delhi. The Indian Airlines are on strike and flights are being canceled. The flight that you are supposed to be on from Delhi to Bagdogra to go up into the mountains for the convention has been canceled! My friend who works for Indian Airlines told me there is no possible way for you to make it to the convention."

I said, "Listen, brother, God told me to be there and somehow I will be there!" He said, "I see no way possible, but I trust your faith!" I did not have the heart to tell him that we did not even have our visas yet.

Esther Fast

I was also facing several other obstacles and was definitely in an impossible situation, but I knew the Lord had led me to go. I knew He promised me peace about India. (He provided our plane tickets at the last moment, and I knew He would provide our visas.) My *Adventures in Missions* records include the following:

I read the whole book of Esther last night, and I am on this Esther fast because of the impossible situation I am in. I believe this is the first time I have been on a fast with no liquids and it's rough, especially since I am so busy. With weakness and body aches, I spent much time in the Word and in prayer. I was then able to prepare several radio broadcasts and

messages for India, write a newsletter, along with some other essentials, so I could leave. I usually fast with liquids because I believe that is the healthy way to do it. I cannot afford to lose any more weight before India, but the Lord has led me to this type of fast—so we will see how the Lord intervenes.

Visas Arrive Last Day

We had applied for our visas many weeks earlier but still had not received them. The Wednesday before Thanksgiving, November 22, Karen and I went to the post office, but they were not there, and we were supposed to leave Monday. I said, “Lord, You spoke to my heart. You promised that You would get me to this convention, and I have given my word.”

We came back to the ministry center and prayed in the midst of an apparently hopeless situation. All of a sudden we received a collect phone call from the consulate of India in New York. He said, “I have your visas; they are approved. I will mail them out today (Wednesday, November 22—the day before Thanksgiving).” I said, “I am leaving Monday before noon; they will never get here in time.” So, he said he would send them Federal Express.

Karen said, “We want to thank you very much.” He said, “Do not thank me, thank your congressman.” We had called the consulate many times with no progress, so we called Tom Ridge’s office for assistance, the same way Paul used his Roman citizenship. However, even the congressman’s secretary was having trouble getting them to respond until they finally called us collect.

Because of the hassle we had over these visas, I told Karen I would not believe he was really mailing them until I had the visas in hand, but continued to trust in the Lord to work this out. Sure enough, the visas for me, BJ and Rick arrived by Federal Express the very last day possible for us to receive them.

Looking in our passports after we finally got them back, it appeared that, on one page, our request to enter India was rejected, but then that was cancelled, and another page indicated our visas were approved. Who knows, maybe the Indian consulate thought Bill Rudge was related to Tom Ridge.

Stranded in Delhi

Delhi has three terminals—the international terminal where we arrived, the Air Bus terminal and the Boeing terminal for domestic flights. We were the only passengers not to have our luggage checked by customs. Everyone else had their luggage inspected, but somehow we were able to walk right through. Thank the Lord because I had many of our books and audio tapes in my luggage. They may have made us pay a customs fee or not allowed them to enter.

When we went outside the international terminal we were swarmed by taxi drivers. We finally loaded into one and headed to the Air Bus terminal. The taxi

driver had a companion with him, and I am sure they thought about robbing us. They said they needed U.S. money to travel to the U.S. and asked how much we could exchange for Indian money. I said we left our money at the Air Bus terminal with a man from India who was waiting for us there.

We were taken to the Air Bus terminal by taxi. After unloading and waiting in line, they told us if we were going to Bagdogra, we must go to the Boeing terminal, so we loaded our suitcases into another taxi and headed to the Boeing terminal. At the Boeing terminal, they told us that, because of the engineer strike, the direct flight to Bagdogra was canceled, and we should go back to the Air Bus terminal and try to get a plane to Calcutta and then fly from Calcutta to Bagdogra.

This was the third time we had to load and unload our ten suitcases in and out of the taxi and in and out of the terminals. We were going broke from all the tips we had to pay. Finally, back at the Air Bus terminal, they tried to send us back to the Boeing terminal. But I said, "Listen, I have been shuffled back and forth, and I am staying here until you get me to Calcutta."

I went from one line to another, and no one seemed able to help or even seemed to care about the growing line of upset and stranded people.

The convention I was scheduled to speak at was to start the next day, but the people at the counter I kept bothering said, "You will not get out of here for days. There are hundreds of people stranded like you." Two ex-Marines I met said, "We have been trying to get out of here for days!"

I finally got a chance to talk to the duty manager at the airport, but he was so frantic with all the other people complaining that he could not have cared less. I said, "I have to speak at a convention in the Himalayas tomorrow, and I have to get there." He said, "I'll see what I can do."

We were trying to have our tickets changed so we could fly from Delhi to Calcutta and then make a connecting flight from Calcutta to Bagdogra. But we were told we were numbers 71, 72 and 73 on the waiting list and may not get out for days.

We were stranded in the airport at Delhi for almost 12 hours with no apparent way out and no one to help us. We had not slept for almost two days and had not had anything to eat or drink for over 12 hours (we forgot we had food and juice in our suitcases). We were in a situation where we were now in the minority and those in charge did not speak very good English. We felt like heading home, but I knew the Lord brought us here for a purpose.

I called Karen and said, "Karen, we're in a real bind. It's totally impossible to get out of this airport to make it to the convention." I said, "Call for prayer." She started crying, but after I assured her we would be fine, we hung up. She contacted people in the U.S. to pray as the three of us held hands in the airport and prayed.

After having approached the ticket offices five or six times and being told

there was no way they could help us, I walked in that direction again. I dropped to my knees in the airport by one of the seats and said, "God, You brought me here. You're going to have to fulfill Your Word and make the way possible!" I walked over to the duty manager in charge of the airport one last time. I said, "Listen, I've got to be in Calcutta and then in Bagdogra. I've got to be at a convention." He looked at me like he could not care less. Then all of a sudden, his countenance changed in front of my face, and he looked at me and said, "I am going to get you on that airplane to Calcutta."

Thirty minutes before the plane was to leave, everybody was boarding but we had not received notice we would be on it. I went up to the duty manager again: "You said you would get us on that plane, and it is going to leave." He said, "Just trust me." More and more people were boarding, and I was certain it was going to be filled, so I went looking for him again and this time he said, "Come!"

You never saw three people move ten suitcases so fast as we got in line to fly to Calcutta. We finally got up to check in our ten pieces of luggage—three of which were large suitcases filled with clothes from CCNA to give to the orphans. They told me our luggage was overweight, and I would have to pay extra. I pulled out a CCNA letter from John DelTurco (he gave it to me in case I had any trouble) and handed it to the man as I told him we have clothes and items to help the orphans like Mother Teresa does in Calcutta. They let us go through with no charge.

We were all on the bus getting ready to head to the plane when about half the people began to run off. I discovered quickly that even though you just checked in your luggage, you had to go outside and identify it, so they could put a chalk mark on it and then load it on the plane, otherwise it would not be loaded on the plane. This is to make certain someone did not put a bomb in their luggage and then not get on the plane.

We arrived in Calcutta and stayed overnight at a hotel. Then, we caught a plane the next morning from Calcutta to Bagdogra where Brother Dutt's son, Dilip, and several others met us to take us up the Himalayan mountains to the convention site.

A Happy Brother Dutt

You never saw a person as happy as Brother Dutt when we arrived for the Annual Himalayan Convention at Takdah on time. Three times at this convention, he said, "It is a miracle Brother Rudge is here. He's God's man for this convention so listen to the words that he speaks as being from the Lord."

And they listened for up to three hours each service hardly moving at all. The response to the messages and altar calls was incredible. I was only supposed to speak about four or five times, but Brother Dutt ended up having me speak many more times because the response was going so well.

Many of the pastors and people walked four and five hours to get to this

convention. One pastor drove a motorbike 130 miles through the Himalayan mountains with a member of his church on the back. It took him more than seven hours to come from Bhutan. (Bhutan is a Buddhist country ruled by a king and queen and closed to the Gospel. No churches are allowed, so he has his church in India near the Bhutan border, which people from Bhutan attend.)

Most of the people at the Himalayan convention slept on the cold floor with only their clothes and blankets to keep them warm because there was no heat in any of the buildings.

In broken English, Tilak asked me to come and pray. He led me to a bull. Brother Dutt explained that his faith promise at last year's convention was to provide meat for this year's convention. He saved his money, bought a bull and fed it all year. Now, he wanted me to pray that God would bless his faith promise before he slaughtered it.

I thought, *I have never prayed for a bull before, but okay.* So, he brought out this large bull with big horns. I held one horn and told BJ to hold the other horn. I did not quite know how to pray for a bull, so I prayed the Lord would bless Tilak and multiply this faith promise to feed all the people at the convention.

In the Himalayas, the daytime temperature goes up to about 70 degrees, but at night, it goes below freezing. The orphanage we were staying at had no heat, and my room was semi-outside with windows stuck partially open.

BJ and I slept in Swiss sleeping bags on cots beside each other. We had to wear thermal socks and thermal underwear. They gave us hot water bottles before we went to bed to put in our sleeping bags to keep us warm. By 5:00 a.m., the bottles would be cold, and we would lay there freezing until the sun came out.

Brother Dutt told me before the trip, "Oh sure, you'll have a shower in India where you're staying." They did not lie. They gave me a bucket with a cup and said, "Here's your shower!"

I gave away all my clothes (except what I was wearing) before coming home. The people at the convention were very appreciative of our clothes, boots and shoes. I also gave away a lot of books, audio tapes and everything else I had brought. We even gave them our empty plastic water bottles, which the pastors would fill with water and take with them while traveling the rough mountain terrain to witness and preach in the mountain villages.

Genghis Khan

The area of the Himalayas in India where I spoke is bordered by China (Tibet), Bhutan and Nepal. It is populated by people from these countries, as well as refugees from Pakistan and Bangladesh.

The first night I was sitting on the platform in this large tent with more than 400 men, women and children gathered around me, staring at me with

expressionless faces. They were wearing heavy winter coats because of the cold as they sat squatting on the ground or sitting on benches. I felt like Genghis Khan (1162 -1227 AD, the Mongolian founder of the Yuan Dynasty) addressing the Mongolian hordes.

I was told that many of the people came from backgrounds of Hinduism, Buddhism, idolatry, spiritism, ancestor worship, demon worship, sorcery, witchcraft and various other forms of occultism and mysticism.

Dilip and Brother Dutt informed me that many of the men in attendance were former witch doctors and Buddhist lamas (monks). Some had formerly been “headhunters.” They would capture their enemies at night in the mountain villages, cut off their heads, put the heads in nylon bags and hang them on posts around the market area to instill fear in their enemies. Some had killed many people.

Flashlight Provides Valuable Lesson on Discernment

To get to the convention site, we had to walk on mountain trails from the orphanage where we were staying. At night, it was so dark we had to use flashlights. On the last night of the convention, I decided to stay back at the orphanage by myself to spend some extra time in prayer before my final message. When it was time for me to go, I realized it was nearly pitch black with just a little light coming from the moon and stars, so I walked the mountain trail alone with only a small flashlight.

It is amazing how a trail that takes five minutes to walk in the daytime becomes so difficult to walk at night, especially when you are all alone. By then, the convention had already started, and they were singing. I was supposed to be the featured speaker, so I prayed, “Lord, it is going to be a little bit of an adventure. You have to help me take the correct path to get there on time.”

I had to do two things to keep myself on course. First, I had to be very sensitive to my environment. I had to shine my flashlight onto the path and watch for trees, rocks, a narrow wooden bridge over a mountain stream and other signposts I could recognize to make certain I was going the right way. I also had to feel with my feet, so I did not fall over any of the many rocks scattered along the way. Second, I had to be very sensitive to listen for the singing to make certain the path I was taking was getting me closer and closer to the convention site. I also had to be sensitive to hear the sound of running water, so I would know I was going over the right mountain stream, confirmed by the other signposts.

Many trails in the mountains intersect each other. It was imperative that I take the correct trail, not only so I could make it to the convention, but also because one wrong turn could cause me to be lost in the Himalayas all night and possibly freeze to death.

Wild Rides

When we arrived in India, a taxi took us up the Himalayan mountains to the convention site; when it was time to return home, a Jonga (Jeep), with as many as 15 people (some hanging on the back), took us down. It was four hours of winding roads going up and about eight hours coming down (because we went to Darjeeling).

The curves were so sharp the driver was almost continuously honking to let other vehicles or those walking know we were coming. The taxi drivers are paid by the job, so the faster they drive, the more money they make.

About half an hour after BJ and I were nearly killed by a bus while going around a mountain curve with a steep drop-off only inches away from my side of the vehicle, the door I was sitting next to flew open. I almost fell out, but once again, God protected me, and I was able to maintain my balance.

In many places the roads were not wide enough for two vehicles, so one vehicle had to back up. Many times, we were only inches from the edge of thousand-foot drop-offs and only inches from vehicles passing in the other direction.

Brother Dutt said there was no way to do everything I wanted to do and see in the short time we had there, but Dilip met a crazy American who loves adventure. Brother Dutt later told me that instead of taking the quicker and easier route up the Himalayas to the convention, they took the longer and more difficult route because they knew I loved adventure. They said we saw and did more in one week than most do in one month.

In Calcutta, they honk their horns as they speed through the streets and people step out of the way at the very last second. It's amazing that more people are not killed in vehicle accidents or by being hit by vehicles.

Dilip was the wildest driver I ever rode with as he swerved in and out of traffic, missing over a thousand vehicles by only inches — oftentimes at high speeds. He also just missed hitting hundreds of people. As he explained, "You have to drive crazier than anyone else to survive in India, and besides, you do not have much time to do and see all you want to do and see!"

At night, the lights in Dilip's car didn't work, so he drove through the streets and back alleys for several hours with no headlights — playing chicken again with thousands of people who moved at the last second, narrowly missing hundreds of vehicles. It was the wildest ride of my life!

Dilip loved me and wanted me to stay up front with him because I was the only one not afraid to ride with him. He scared half to death most of the other missionaries who visited them. I told BJ and Rick to lock their doors in the back seat and keep their eyes closed and put pillows in front of their faces.

I said to Dilip before leaving, "Now that you are about to be a father, you had better not drive so dangerously anymore!"

There is much more to say about this incredible trip, but its main purpose was summarized in Brother Dutt's March 1990 letter to all the churches and supporters of his ministry:

The Lord in a miraculous way helped Bill Rudge, his son BJ and Brother Rick Chenoweth reach Takdah in the Himalayas on time despite the airlines cancelling so many of their flights due to a strike by engineers. More than 400 people from our churches in the mountains gathered for the convention, braving the severe cold.

Brother Bill Rudge brought dynamic messages including his outstanding testimony. Many were touched by his messages and committed their lives to the Lord. The congregation experienced great revival as they gathered in the altar service at the close of every meeting. We are so grateful to Brother Bill Rudge for coming all the way from the USA to minister at our convention. His ministry has made a lasting impression on the young people of the mountains.

Mission to Nigeria

The ministry was receiving thousands of letters from throughout Africa for our books and audio messages as well as invitations for me to speak. So, in 1991, I went to Nigeria, and a ministry friend, Dave, came with me. Upon arriving at Lagos airport, they did not check my luggage but when they found out I was a minister, I had to go outside, open it up and give some books and pamphlets to them as gifts.

We cleared customs in Lagos at about 10:00 p.m. Saturday, October 12, and met Pastor Chris. We were surrounded outside the airport on our way to the car. I was carrying a couple of suitcases and had two bags over my shoulders. An envelope with some Ghanaian money was visible in one of my bags because the zipper was broken. I purposely left it visible for two reasons: First, so it would be handy in case I saw a place in the airport to exchange it for Nigerian currency. The other reason was that if someone were going to rob me, as I anticipated, they would go for the envelope of cash sticking out of my bag. (While at the airport in Pittsburgh, I left an envelope containing Ghanaian currency at the money exchange counter. An hour later, as we were leaving a restaurant, the woman from the money exchange just happened to see us. She told me I had left the money envelope, so I went back and got it. Otherwise, it might have been a different scenario in Lagos.)

Sure enough, when we were getting ready to load our luggage in the car, there were about forty people around us wanting to help, so we would have to pay each of them. All of a sudden, in the ruckus, I felt this guy bump me, and I knew something was taken from my bag. He ran, so I chased him and caught him. I thought he stole my passport which I had purposely put in my shirt pocket, so I could see if anyone tried to steal it. I did not want to put it back in my

money belt as everyone would have seen me doing so.

Chris and a number of military personnel, police and airport security circled around him. He would not give back the envelope which I later discovered had the Ghanaian money. I also realized later that he took a book from my bag as well. We were almost in the middle of a riot as they started beating him right there outside the airport, but he would not give it to them, so they finally hauled him away. Chris told me they finally got it from him, but they never returned it to me. They kept it for themselves. (No wonder that after this trip I saw signs in U.S. airports warning that the Lagos, Nigeria, airport does not maintain effective security measures, and it was not recommended for U.S. citizens to travel there. I also later saw in a magazine article that Lagos, Nigeria, is one of the most dangerous cities in the world.)

I knew we were in the midst of danger, but I had His peace that God would protect us, and the end result would be victory.

We finally got in our car, and five minutes later, we had to stop for a police blockade. I had talked to a man at the airport who said that on his previous trip to Nigeria, at one of these blockades, they held him at gunpoint for five hours because they wanted money.

We had to go through ten or more different police checkpoints before we even got out of Lagos. Every time we would get through one, it seemed we were stopping for another. At each checkpoint, they wanted something. They were happy to get one of my books or pamphlets, and I was happy to give it to them.

I had not slept much for several days, so I said to Chris, "I hope you are taking us to a hotel; we're really exhausted!" He said, "No, we have to drive all night to get you to a speaking engagement for tomorrow morning." We endured seven hours of some crazy high-speed driving as we tried to sleep in the back seat and about five or six more police check points before we finally arrived at our destination. The speaking engagements and appearances on national Nigerian television went great.

One morning, I told David that I was concerned about us getting out of Nigeria. Not long thereafter, Chris informed us that elections would be held on Saturday and that no movement was allowed—no airplanes or cars, nothing, until after 5:00 p.m. on Saturday. We had to fly to Lagos Friday morning, so we would be at the airport for Saturday night's flight home.

On Friday, British Air did not open until 2:00 p.m., so we rode around Lagos for about five hours seeing the sights. I checked at the British Air main office in Lagos to see if they could fly us out Friday night instead of Saturday night, but they said it was completely filled for the Friday night flight from Lagos to London and there was no way for us to get out.

I had Chris drop us off at the airport even though we were told the British Air flight was completely full. Pastor Chris wanted to stay with us because he knew how dangerous it would be if we could not get out Friday night, but I told him to

catch his own flight back home, or he would be stranded in Lagos over the weekend during elections.

On our own at the airport in Lagos, we had to go through customs. We gave the officials our passports and paid our departure tax. He wanted some money before he would return my passport and said, "So, now where's my cut?" I had to buy my way through four or five more checkpoints in the airport. They wanted either U.S. dollars, some piece of clothing such as a pair of socks or underwear or whatever we had to give them. My pamphlets were really popular. If I gave them a pamphlet, they let us go through. In the airport, I gave away all my remaining items. I even had to give away my toothpaste and my toothbrush when I had nothing else left to give.

We prayed and went upstairs and just happened to find one British Air office open. I asked the man if there was any way we could get out tonight—at least get to London and hopefully to Pittsburgh. He said, "No, I am sorry, it is totally booked this evening." I knew that if we did not get out, at about 11:00 p.m. on Friday night, we would have had to fend for ourselves on the streets of Lagos without an interpreter all night Friday and all day Saturday until 11:00 p.m. So, I said, "Listen, if you get me out on this flight this evening, I'll give you this watch I have on." (I just remembered the expensive watch given to me by Carolyn Mild from her father for me to give away, but which I had forgotten to do so until just now.) He said, "I am sorry, there is no way out." I took the watch off my wrist, laid it on the counter and said, "This is yours if you get us out tonight!"

The Lord did a "miracle," and we got out that Friday evening. Sure enough, that flight from Lagos to London was completely full with not even one vacant seat, as was our flight from London to Philadelphia.

Divine Protection



T

hroughout the years, the Lord has protected me in some extraordinary ways. As a youth, a vicious German Shepherd dog attacked me while I was riding a bike. I was nearly killed jumping onto a moving train, almost drowned after jumping off a 35-foot-high train trestle and walked away unscathed from a near-tragic freeway accident late at night. The same God who protected me in New Mexico from freezing to death less than a week before my conversion at age 18 has protected me in many ways since then. As a new Christian, I was nearly blinded by a car battery exploding in my face, but I was miraculously unharmed.

I have been threatened, surrounded by hostile people, attacked, put on “hit lists,” had spells cast on me, heard “prophecies” for my destruction, received threats to destroy my ministry and been in frequent situations of extreme danger. Thankfully, the God of the Bible has always either given me the wisdom of how to deal with it or intervened and protected me.

My family and I were “terrorized” in an Arab country. I was stranded hopelessly in Haiti and India, the target of a failed robbery attempt in Lagos, Nigeria, surrounded by 15 agitated and aggressive street people in Nigeria, nearly stranded overnight on the streets of Lagos (a possible death sentence), found myself in the midst of a coup attempt in Haiti, surrounded by Hindus at night in India and caught in a riot in Greece.

While leading a feared voodoo witch doctor to the Lord, the witch doctor, interpreter and I were supernaturally protected from being killed by three angry men armed with machetes and a lead pipe. God also protected us as we were smuggled in and out of a country where it was forbidden to share the Gospel under possible penalty of prison or death.

I was nearly shot during a conflict at a cult complex in West Virginia where the remains of murdered bodies were found later. I was almost killed three times

on mountain roads in Colorado, bitten by a brown recluse spider and twice swarmed by yellow jackets in Pennsylvania. When I went to pick up my son at a friend's house, I rang the doorbell and knocked, but there was no answer. So, I opened the door and stepped in to acknowledge I was there when the boy's father began screaming at me to get out quickly. Two of his Great Dane dogs were charging down the steps toward me. I jumped back and closed the door just in the nick of time.

My 13-year-old son and I were nearly struck and run over by a speeding bus in the Himalayan mountains of northern India—it slid to a stop just two feet in front of us. On another occasion, I, and those traveling with me in the Himalayan mountains, came within inches of going over the edge in a Jeep. The first female suicide bomber detonated herself at the exact site I stood 23 hours earlier after speaking to a messianic congregation in Jerusalem, killing herself and one other person and injuring 115 people. I was escorted across Egypt by armed guards in a caravan of armed vehicles due to the high risk of terrorism. And over the years, I have been in several Middle Eastern countries during threatened attacks against U.S. citizens.

Following a speaking engagement in British Columbia, my family survived a violent four-vehicle collision in Oregon, which totaled the station wagon we were riding in. I survived several other bad vehicle accidents. My wife Karen and I faced great peril in the California wildfires. Our two young children and three of their friends became separated from their group and wandered the streets of New York City by themselves for several hours. Two men in a van in Pennsylvania attempted to abduct our pre-teen daughter—it was thwarted by her friend who pulled her free from a man trying to drag her into a van. Armed guards in Jordan attempted to abduct our 13-year-old daughter from a bus. Karen was diagnosed with cancer in 2004 and given less than five years to live.

I clearly heard a voice say “Stop!” as I began to pull into an intersection in Jackson Center seconds before a semi-truck whizzed by within a few feet of my vehicle. Placing my hand on the door handle of my vehicle late at night, leaving to meet with a former prisoner who called for help, I distinctly heard the word “Ambush.” I fell on my knees and prayed, then continued alone to what proved to be a setup from which only God could have delivered me. Not long ago, my clothes and hat caught on fire from a gasoline explosion.

These are merely highlights of some of the many dangerous and life-threatening circumstances I have faced.

Almost Crushed By Stack of Picnic Tables

Greg Callahan sent me the following on March 24, 1999, regarding an incident that happened when we were teenagers at B Street Playground in Sharon, Pennsylvania.

Tonight as I was reading your book, *Reaching Your Maximum Potential in Christ*, it came back to me about when you had a card game where you

would flip cards and bet you knew which card was mine. Well, you got me, and I got a lot of other people, too. But what truly puts a tear in my eye is that we used to stack those picnic tables three high and play cards on top of the third one. They were large and heavy picnic tables which took several guys to move. One day you and I were sitting on one side of the picnic table stacked three high and somehow it went tumbling over. Those tables had to weigh at least a couple hundred pounds and we fell quite a way. We were both sitting with our feet under the table so that when it fell there was no way out! When we hit the cement floor the seat hit first so that we did not get crushed. It just amazes me that we could have been killed or crippled all those years ago, but by the grace of God nothing happened and here we are today.

Saved by the Gift of a Soccer Ball

It was a Saturday night in March 1993 when my team and I arrived back at the Mission Possible compound after an outreach in Gonaives, Haiti. We heard voodoo drums, so I decided to go research a Rara, a unique form of festival music used for street dancing. Bob, Toni and BJ went with me, while the others stayed back at the compound.

The lights go out at the compound at 9:00 p.m. It was pitch black, so we each took a flashlight. I told Bob, Toni and BJ that if we got into trouble to turn off our flashlights and run into the jungle and hide until morning. Edmond, the night guard at the mission compound who spoke a little English, saw us going and insisted on coming with us. He took us the back way through jungle trails.

As we were walking down a narrow path to get close to the site where more than 100 voodoo practitioners were gathered, the ceremony was just breaking up and the participants were heading up to the street to dance from hut to hut. Those with me stepped to the side of the narrow path to get out of their way, but when the Rara participants saw us, about 40 of them surrounded us.

I had no idea what they were going to do. Some of the men and women and teens sounded extremely agitated. Not being able to speak their language nor knowing their intentions, I quickly pondered an escape behind a nearby hut but decided to stay and face them. It was a good thing we did not try to run into the jungle because there was a high fence behind the hut, and we were trapped.

Toni and BJ stood behind me, and Bob stood beside me. When the hostility was at its peak, two of the younger boys, who had played soccer with BJ a couple of days earlier and received a gift of a soccer ball from him, saw BJ was in trouble and stood by him. One of them held BJ's hand.

The leader of the Rara said to Edmond, "Are the white people afraid?" Edmond replied, "No, the white people are not afraid!" Women started dancing around us, but Edmond said to them, "These are Christians; they do not want you to dance for them; they are only here to watch." Edmond later said they were

saying, “I danced for you, now pay me!”

After some harsh glares and comments, the participants at the Rara continued their procession up to the street where the people began dancing from hut to hut to receive money. My team went up to the street, watched for a few minutes, so they would know that we were not afraid and then headed to the mission compound.

A few days before my team and I arrived in Haiti, a Haitian woman at a Rara was slashed on her face with machetes and left to die by two drunken men. She was taken to a Haitian medical center, but was told they could do nothing. Then, she was taken to the Baptist Mission Hospital where Doctor Rhode’s (who was also staying at Mission Possible with us) daughter is a nurse. She did not know if she could save her, but began to sew her back together. She did live but is scarred for life.

Thank the Lord that Edmond went with us to interpret, or it could have been a much different scenario. What was a small problem could have easily—with language barriers—escalated into a life-threatening situation. The Rara participants’ aggression could have led to a fight for survival—one I now know we could not have won. For all I knew then, the Haitians could have been saying, “We are going to kill you, prepare to die.”

It was the Lord and the gift of a soccer ball that saved our lives.

Brown Recluse Spider Bite



T

he brown recluse spider is one of the most poisonous spiders in the United States.

On Saturday, June 25, 2005, I spent most of the day cleaning the shed and working outside at the ministry center in western Pennsylvania. While washing up after my labors, I noticed a red blister on my left middle finger, but since I had not seen or felt anything that might have caused it, I assumed it was just a blood blister or a splinter because I had not worn gloves. When I squeezed it to pop the blister or remove the splinter, blood gushed out and the pain was intense. Not knowing what it was, I put some gel on it and a band-aid.

Just the week before, Lois Greathouse, one of our staff, sent Karen an e-mail about brown recluse spiders which Karen had not opened. When Lois asked if she'd read it, Karen looked over the article, noting the photos of what the bite looked like and its symptoms.

A week later, I showed Karen my finger and that it was not healing. Karen was shocked and said it looked like a brown recluse spider bite. I said, "Yeah, right." The next day, when Lois came to work at the ministry center, Karen had me show her my finger. She also said that it looked like a brown recluse bite, but I disagreed because I did not think we had brown recluse spiders in our area. By Sunday, July 2, 2005, I had put gel on it for a week. It was not worse, but it was not better.

On Wednesday, July 13, during a ministry board meeting, Bill Wardle told us about his son, Charles, who lost a leg and eventually his life from the bite of a brown recluse spider. While in his Texas garden, Charles was bitten on the side of his foot. For 20 months, he was in and out of a hospital in Houston as they tried "every treatment imaginable" to heal the wound and prevent infection, but the wound would not heal. They amputated his leg at the knee, but the venom had

damaged deeper tissue and infiltrated his system. Four months later at the age of 36, he died.

Still not thinking my blister could be from a brown recluse spider, Karen and I happened upon Dr. M and his wife (both having served overseas as medical missionaries) while walking at Buhl Park. He said it might be an infected wart, so I began wrapping it daily after using gel, sometimes adding raw garlic. Four days later (Saturday, July 24), my brother Ken saw my finger and prayed for it, though I did not think it necessary to pray for an infected “wart.”

While at my daughter’s house a few days later, her husband Clayton noticed that I had been keeping my finger wrapped, so he asked to see it. When I unwrapped it, he also said that it might be a brown recluse spider bite. Karen checked on the internet and that was what it appeared to be.

The very next day, I dropped off a couple of new books I had written at Dr. D’s office and showed him my finger in passing. He was not sure what it was but said he would cut it out if it was not better in a week.

By Saturday, July 30, finally accepting that the lesion was from a brown recluse spider bite, I cleaned out the shed and used spider spray to eliminate all the spiders I could find along with three yellow jacket nests. That evening I called Trapper John (the ultimate outdoorsman in our region who was an expert on insects, animals and plants). He told me to wrap my finger with a white bread and sugar poultice; if it was unchanged the next morning, it was a brown recluse bite. Determining it was as he thought, Trapper John said to me on Sunday, July 31, “This could be very bad since people have been known to die from the bite of the spider, while others have lost limbs.” He was impressed that I did not seem upset but responded to him that the Lord would get me through this.

In treating my finger, I consumed many nutrients to build my immune system. I also bounced on a rebounder to benefit my lymphatic system. I put lots of gel on it, soaked it in Dead Sea water and used onion, garlic and charcoal poultices. Above all, I prayed often that the Lord would protect me and use this ordeal for His glory.

On Tuesday, August 9, Karen and I went to Dr. Mantell’s office (a medical and nutritional doctor) for her follow-up appointment. He was amazed at how well Karen was doing and how good she looked since her first visit. However, he was very concerned about my finger and said I could die from it. He was not quite certain what to do but told me that if it was not better in a week, I had better get the mass cut off. Many other people suggested that I needed to get it cut off; no one seemed to have a satisfactory alternative solution.

I realized that this was the most relentless wound I had ever seen. My finger seemed to get better overnight and worsened in the day from bumping and use. Each time I even lightly bumped it, it felt like a wasp sting. I bumped it many times. It was also squeezed or stepped on by my grandchildren. The pain was excruciating.

I continued to hear horror stories from people about how the complex venom of the brown recluse can “eat flesh” by causing injury and death (necrosis) of the surrounding tissues and how I could lose my finger, hand, arm or life. A man who sold brown recluse first aid kits on the internet told me that if it gets in the blood it could spread sores throughout the body. He said having a good immune system limits the effects of the venom, so I was thankful the Lord had motivated me many years earlier to eat nutritiously.

I tried everything I knew to do to get this venomous sac out of my finger. Nothing seemed to work, but at least it had not spread. The antibiotics that doctors recommend would have been ineffective because it was not a bacterial infection, but poisonous venom. In the two months that I had been dealing with this and after talking to numerous doctors, nurses and concerned others, no one knew of anyone who beat it through self-treatment. What do you do when you do not know what to do? Pray and persevere.

I knew I would learn valuable lessons through this and draw even closer to my Lord. I was not being foolish or presumptuous, but doing what I believed to be best. I decided on a three-pronged attack: 1) prayer for healing and wisdom about what to do, 2) internal cleansing, 3) external drawing out of the venom.

On Tuesday, August 23, my son BJ called me during soccer practice to tell me that one of his assistant coaches, Dr. Segarra, head of the Emergency Room at our local hospital, would look at my finger. I drove down to the soccer field and when Dr. Segarra first saw my blackened finger, he was ready to take me to the hospital and cut it off. When I explained that it was partially covered in charcoal, he was relieved. He said I was definitely bitten by something, but it no longer looked like a brown recluse bite because the charcoal poultice had drawn it out into a “tumor.” He recommended Dr. Piston cut it out; and that I may need some therapy on the finger since the bite was so close to my joint and the finger was immobile. Dr. Segarra was amazed my finger and hand were not infected, so I explained how I was eating nutritiously, consuming large amounts of garlic and using poultices to draw out the venom.

The next day, I reached my limit of bumping my finger all the time because of the intense pain and resulting inflammation. I tried tearing the tumor off and got about halfway, but it started bleeding profusely. It was attached to a blood vessel and would probably need to be cauterized. I knew I had drawn out all the venom by then, and still it had not burst. It was time to have it removed.

Karen was having minor anxiety attacks about my finger, and Tabitha and other family members and friends were getting very concerned. I decided it was not worth the hassle anymore as it was putting everyone under stress, so I called Dr. Piston’s office. He was not in. I cut a small part of the tissue mass off but did not go any deeper because it began to bleed.

With growing pressure from my wife and daughter, I called Dr. Piston’s office again on Friday morning, August 26, and this time left a voice message. One of his secretaries called back and scheduled me to see his associate, Dr. Tropeano,

since Dr. Piston was in surgery all day.

About an hour before the appointment, I accidentally hit my finger on the refrigerator door and ripped the tissue back. Blood gushed out—all over the kitchen floor and sink. I tried to pull the “tissue” the rest of the way off, but it started gushing blood when I pulled it back. Underneath the “blob,” I could see the original red mark on my finger from when I was bitten.

Dr. Tropeano examined my finger. The x-rays showed no bone damage. He said my body did a great job healing itself and eventually this would heal on its own, but it would leave a large bump on my finger. So, we scheduled surgery for Monday at 11:30 a.m.

On Sunday, August 28, I recorded in my journal, “Since the spider bite on June 25, I have prayed and trusted the Lord and done self-treatments.” Pastor Craig Snyder and the elders at the Sharon Alliance church anointed me with oil and prayed for my upcoming surgery.

On Monday, August 29, I arrived at the local hospital at 9:00 a.m. with surgery scheduled no later than 11:30 a.m. They still had not come to get me by 1:30 p.m. I was about to leave when they finally came. In the surgical preparation room, they tried four different times to hook me up to an IV sedative that would put me to sleep, but I had just finished a two-week internal cleanse and was not about to put any drugs into my body. Finally, Dr. Tropeano came in, and I convinced him that I would be fine without drugs to sedate me and would not move my finger during surgery. He finally agreed, but said I would need to have an IV in my arm in case they had to sedate me, to which I consented. When I told the doctor that I did not want to wake up and find my finger missing, he said, “I will not take your finger off now. That would have to be later if this does not work!”

It was a most interesting procedure to observe. They strapped me onto the operating table, put heart monitors on me, put a blood pressure cuff on my right arm, a tourniquet on my left arm and a surgical drape over me. The shots at the base of my finger and into the actual spider bite were excruciating, but I told myself they were like wasp stings and would only hurt a few seconds. I did not move or make a sound.

I prayed, meditated on the Word and occasionally did deep breathing during the procedure. The Lord gave me great peace—in spite of not yet understanding why the surgery was required—why I could not beat it with prayer, nutrition and poultices. As the surgeon excised the mass from my finger, I felt various sensations: movement and pressure (but no pain), the irrigation fluid running down my arm as they flushed the wound and heat on my hand from the electrocautery. At the end of the surgery, the doctor said I did great, and the female assistant added, “You are very brave!”

The surgeon said he cleaned it out down to the bone and was amazed that I had no surrounding tissue damage. Although given a prescription for pain

medicine and antibiotics, I did not fill either one, and when the local wore off, I felt virtually no pain. Physical therapy would begin the next day to hopefully get the finger to bend normally again. It had been longer than a month since I had been able to bend it.

On Tuesday, August 30, as I left rehab at Dr. Piston's, the receptionist asked how my finger was doing. When I responded that it was "doing fine" she said, "You know that you are infamous here because of that spider bite."

That night, I realized how difficult it is to do seemingly simple tasks such as filling my gas tank with one hand, especially in heavy rain when I was not supposed to get my finger wet. Then, I noticed a man pumping gas while sitting in a wheelchair. Since he was alone, I offered to help as I obtained a better perspective on what "inconvenience" really is.

On Tuesday, September 20th, Dr. Tropeano said my finger was doing great and that after two more weeks of rehab, I could resume full activity. He said it may take up to six more weeks before all the numbness is gone in my finger and that it was definitely a brown recluse spider bite.

When Dr. Tropeano asked me the name of the antibiotics I took after the surgery, I told him I never got the prescription filled, but kept a close watch for infection. He said that was fine and that my finger looked great. I told him that I thanked the Lord for helping him do such a great surgery on my finger to which he heartily agreed.

Buhl Day

Almost a year later, on Labor Day (September 4, 2006), I walked by Trapper John's booth at Buhl Day with my family. Trapper was surrounded by people, but when he saw me, he called me over as he told the people gathered there that I had been bitten by a brown recluse spider. He asked me to hold up my left hand as he proclaimed, "This is a miracle. Bill could have lost his hand or more."

In Trapper John's words:

I am well aware of the tragic results of being bitten by a recluse spider. Many people have suffered intense pain and lost some part of their anatomy because of this spider's poison. Yet because of Bill's complete trust and faith in Jesus Christ, his finger healed beautifully. He has no scar, no loss of flesh around the area bitten, nor any adverse results from this bite. Like the Bible says, "Faith can move mountains" or in this case, stop a disaster by healing a finger!

Everyone I know who has been bitten by a brown recluse spider lost all or part of a limb or has a hole in their leg or arm. Bill does not even have a mark on his finger. It is truly a miracle. Some people say they have faith, but Bill proved his faith when he faced the brown recluse spider bite. I am convinced that without God's help, he would have a stub for a hand.

The Lord Protected

During and following my ordeal, I was told several accounts of people who had lost all or part of a finger, hand, arm, foot or leg or were hospitalized for months from complications as a result of a brown recluse spider bite. The only side effect I had from this highly venomous, deadly spider bite was a growth on my finger from the venom being drawn out by poultices. There is not even a mark on my finger that indicates I was ever bitten by a brown recluse spider. I can only praise the Lord for His protection.

Like Paul's viper bite, I showed none of the symptoms the literature said could happen, only a temporary localized bite, which I believe the Lord used to confirm that I really was bitten by a brown recluse spider.

Clearly, the Lord protected me and taught me many valuable lessons. He has turned my difficult journey into opportunities to share the Gospel with many and be a testimony of His faithfulness and protection.

On Saturday, October 28, 2006, at my son-in-law's welcome home party at the ministry center, Chrissy Snyder, a friend of Tabitha's, told us of an acquaintance recently bitten by a brown recluse spider: he lost his arm and then lost his life from it.

In September 2012, at a local restaurant with my brother Larry, we met Tom and Pam Hackett. Her right hand was missing from just above the wrist. I said to her, "Didn't you get bitten by a brown recluse spider?" She said, "That's how I lost my arm." I then asked her where on her arm she was bitten. She said it was on the first knuckle of her right hand ring finger. Mine was in the exact location but on my left middle finger.

Be Wise

I do not recommend that anyone follow the protocol I chose; mine consisted of much experimentation and a lot of what I refer to as PP—Prayer and Perseverance! Be wise and follow the path that your health care provider suggests and what you (and the Lord) deem to be the best procedure for healing.

Smoking Hot!



The following was compiled by BRM staff writer Darlinda McDonald as gleaned from several eyewitness accounts.

Bill had been fasting and had just completed a study in the book of Daniel about Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego's ordeal in the fiery furnace. Following his own frightening ordeal, Bill commented, "Unlike Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego in the fiery furnace, my body was singed, my clothes were burnt, and I smelled like smoke—a reminder of my foolishness and perhaps a testimony of God's protection once again."

It was a cool but sunny and lightly breezy morning at Bill Rudge Ministries on Tuesday, February 6, 2024. Bill and ministry volunteer Bruce Adams had been cutting up limbs from two trees that another volunteer, Dick Hetrick, had felled to make room for the new construction project to store thousands of Bill's books that would soon be delivered from the printer. They gathered the branches and filled the ministry fire pit. Bill added scrap paper to start a fire, but the twigs and small limbs were too damp to light. Bill had tried several times before to burn this pile but without success. So, with staff volunteers and approval from the local fire department, Bill decided this was the day to do it.

Despite a caution about the dangers from Bruce, Bill asked him to retrieve a can of gasoline. Bill poured from the 3-gallon can, saturating the branches and stepped back. Nothing happened. He approached the pit again to splash more gasoline on the pile. Suddenly, it was like a scene from Gehenna! The air in front of him exploded in a ball of fire, engulfing Bill's upper torso. He jumped backward with the gas can in hand, not knowing his clothing and hat were on fire. When Bruce yelled that he was on fire, Bill immediately threw off his burning hat and struggled unsuccessfully to pull off his tightly layered shirts together with the vest jacket over his head in one motion. Bruce patted down his

burning clothes with gloved hands but to no avail. Shaken, Bruce told him to “drop to the ground and roll” but after rolling several times, he was still on fire. Bill shouted to Bruce, “Get my shirts off!” Together, they peeled them off over his head one at a time. Thoughts of Christian martyrs being burned to death flashed through Bill’s mind. The skin around his eyes felt burnt and painful—his eyelashes and eyebrows were gone. He received burns to his head, face, neck and hands.

Right after they got Bill’s shirts off, Jim Weikal called to see if he wanted him to help cut wood. He asked why Bill was out of breath, so Bill told him he had caught fire and Bruce was still helping him put out the flames, even as the clothes on the ground continued to burn. Following the call, Bill went inside to evaluate the burns on his head, face, under his eyes, neck and hands, then lathered up with aloe vera gel and went back outside to work with the guys.

Shocked to learn of Bill’s mishap, Jim came right over and worked with Bill for another two hours as they hauled branches to the burning fire ring. They also cut up more branches and raked while carrying on a conversation. Jim said, “If I had not been told Bill was burned, I am not sure I would have known! He looked like someone with a light sunburn or windburn, and he worked as he normally does. I called a nurse who works with skin wounds for some advice. She listened to his story of the incident, responding that God must have been watching over Bill because gasoline and fire are a deadly mixture.”

Karen came outside and insisted Bill go to the hospital, or she was going to call an ambulance, but Bill assured her he was all right and needed to continue helping the guys.

Ministry volunteer Rosemary Lozier was in the office when Bill walked in with smoke still rolling off his body. She could not believe her eyes. Bill pointed out what was left of his shirt, hat and vest jacket he had been wearing just a few minutes before: lying on the ground was only a tiny piece of his shirt and his hat that had melted into the vest jacket. Rosemary said, “The Lord had His mighty hand on Bill today, just as He has for Bill’s entire life!”

Ken Ridgley said, “What struck me was that the only thing left of the gas can was a little piece with a little red dot on it. The rest of the can was gone.”

Bill’s son and daughter insisted he go to Urgent Care because of the first- and second-degree burns. Bill agreed to alleviate their concern, but when informed by the receptionist how long the wait would be, he left. Son-in-law Clayton thought he might need an IV, but Bill drank lots of water. When Karen asked Bill what his pain level was the next day, he said, “A one.” She asked if that was “a Bill Rudge pain level?” He said, “How else could I gauge my pain?” She then said, “Well, what if it was me?” He replied, “A six.”

For the first two days, Bill treated the burn areas with aloe vera gel every couple of hours. A few times, he used silver gel and twice, manuka honey. There was barely a trace of burns left after this treatment.

Bill's granddaughter Caeley said one of Bill's new life verses was Isaiah 43:2-3—"When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they will not overflow you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be scorched, nor will the flame burn you. For I am the LORD your God...."

Afterward, Bill was told of several similar scenarios where the person's face melted, they died or faced a long hospital stay. Truly, God protected both him and Bruce.

No Doubt

There is no doubt that the God of the Bible has protected me, my family and others with me, on several occasions. All these incidents serve to validate the reality and faithfulness of the Lord whom I wholeheartedly seek to serve and glorify in every aspect of my life—physically, mentally, emotionally and spiritually.

Why Does Bill Rudge Use Personal Illustrations?



Karen Chenoweth wrote the following article for a past newsletter.

In addition to sound biblical teaching, you will discover many personal illustrations throughout the ministry newsletters, Bill's books and audio messages. Did you ever wonder why? There are several reasons that Bill writes and speaks in this fashion.

First, he uses personal experiences to validate the reality and faithfulness of the God of the Bible. Bill's illustrations of the miracles and marvelous events that have occurred over the decades of ministry events, mission trips and daily life were documented by many eyewitnesses, and he feels compelled by God's Spirit to share what God has done in his life and ministry.

The example of the Apostle Paul is that he frequently shared his personal testimony to validate the Gospel of Christ, and he also often told about what God was doing in his ministry (for example, Acts 26; Romans 15:18-20).

Bill is not boasting in the flesh but giving all the glory to the Lord. Bill seeks to walk in humility before the Lord. God's Word and Spirit revealed to him in the early days of his ministry that pride, haughtiness, bragging and boasting would destroy him and his ministry.

Second, in an age of distortion of the truth and abject skepticism, Bill's accounts and testimonies are a powerful witness for biblical Christianity. They validate and help to unfold the reality of the God of the Bible to others who may otherwise not even be familiar with the word "Gospel."

For example, a woman who was in the New Age movement for over 20 years met Bill in California. She listened politely as he shared the evidence for the

Christian faith, but when he began to share stories of some of the miraculous interventions that God has done in his life (such as “Saved by the Gift of a Soccer Ball”), she listened even more intently. She commented, “You must publish these accounts and share them with others!”

Third, Bill ministers to people of almost every social status, cultural background and education level. His many illustrations and accounts of God’s interventions and faithfulness take the profound truth of Scripture and make it relevant and understandable to all people.

Fourth, Bill often uses personal examples because in the early days of the ministry, he used illustrations from other people, discovering later that some of their stories were exaggerated, distorted or outright fabrications. Therefore, he is very cautious about using another person’s illustrations and focuses mainly on his own, which can be documented, validated and defended.

Some people are called to be theologians or philosophers. They focus on biblical interpretations or linguistics. While Bill loves to explain the Word, he feels that the Lord has called him to focus on sharing testimonies of God’s faithfulness from the Scriptures and his own life. As an ardent student of Scripture, Bill daily engages in diligent Bible study, prayer and regularly fasts so that his messages and conduct are consistent with the Word of God.

It is not people’s opinions that matters most to Bill, but God’s. Ultimately, Bill will give a full account before the Lord, and it is the Lord Bill seeks to please and obey.

The Loneliest Time of My Life



Sometimes we long for the carefree days of youth when we did not have a worry in the world or an ache in our bodies—just the anticipation of the adventures that lay ahead. But those younger days can also hold the loneliest times of our lives.

It was the summer after I graduated from high school. I was only 17, and it was a time of celebration. My friends and I spent most of our days and nights hanging out, partying, attending dances and swimming at Yankee Lake. I thought the fun would never end. I even lost a good job because a buddy and I wanted to hitchhike down South. That was a week-long adventure; then back to my hometown for more parties and fun.

During this time, I was undecided about my plans for the future. I was torn between enlisting in the Marine Corps and volunteering for Vietnam in September, or living on some secluded island, lifting weights, sipping coconut milk all day and relaxing in a hammock tied between two palm trees. Those were my two very different dreams at graduation. Either way, I planned to spend my summer partying, hoping the fun would never end.

That summer was a great time, but then the inevitable happened. About mid-August, my friends began to disappear. Some left for college, others had to attend mandatory all-day football practice. Some left for military boot camp, while others started jobs their fathers got for them in local mills and factories.

Even the girl I was dating, Karen (for whom I gave up my dream of enlisting in the Marine Corps or Army Rangers) had to return for her senior year of high school. I was left alone with no plan, no purpose and, seemingly, no potential—just frustration about the future and fear of the unknown.

My oldest brother was out West living as a hippie. My second oldest brother

was in the Army. My sister had just gotten married. The brother, four years younger than me, was dead; my youngest brother was only five. Life at home with my parents had become boring. Ages 17 and 18 were rebellious years for me and got me into lots of trouble.

Once again, I was faced with my opposing dreams since graduation: lead a life of military service, or relaxation? I could not know that the Lord was about to intervene in my plans and guide me toward His will for my life.

In desperation, because I was both bored and needed some income, I took a job in a factory working on an assembly line making wooden pallets. After the first hour, I knew this job was not for me but was determined to complete one full week.

However, God had a different plan for me. Karen saw an ad in the newspaper for a fitness instructor for our area's first health spa. Out of the many applicants, the owners from California hired me. I was elated to get paid for something I loved to do—lift weights and instruct others. It was an exciting and sufficient blessing that came right when I needed it most, but even this job did not keep me from getting bored and into trouble.

My restless spirit was not tamed through even this dream job, so a weight-lifting buddy and I hitchhiked out West in search of the answers to life. Although my life was miraculously spared in Santa Fe, I did not make the “God” connection and returned disillusioned and still searching.

The evening of the very day I arrived back home, my life was forever changed through a personal encounter with the resurrected Christ. Karen and I were married two weeks later. I went to Bible college, served as a youth pastor in North Carolina, trained with Youth for Christ and finally started the Bill Rudge Ministries in August 1977.

My life has never been boring since, nor have I searched for fulfillment in anything or anyone other than the Lord Jesus Christ. God has given me more challenges and adventures than I ever imagined possible. And to add to my fulfillment, God has blessed me with a wonderful family and 11 terrific grandchildren.

My Lord is, always has been and always will be, faithful!

What More Shall I Say?



Looking back over the years, one fact stands out clearly: the God who called me has been faithful—rarely making it easy, but He is always faithful. God was moving in my life even before I ever knew Him. A sovereign God protected and aligned circumstances in my life because He knew that one day I would humble myself, repent of my pride and rebellion and surrender my life to Him.

I am humbled by His mercy, grateful for His grace, blessed through His promises, heartened with His words to Jeremiah, “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you [set you apart]...” (Jeremiah 1:5). I am encouraged because of His words through the Apostle Paul, “Faithful is He who calls you, and He also will bring it to pass” (1 Thessalonians 5:24).

Through all the foolish and rebellious things I did before coming to Christ, which could have permanently injured or killed me or had me confined to prison, the Lord somehow intervened and protected me. There was an invisible hand on my life, and now I know Who that hand belonged to.

All that I have accomplished after accepting Christ validates the reality and faithfulness of the God of the Bible, whom I wholeheartedly seek to serve and glorify with every aspect of my life—physical, mental, emotional and spiritual. I have built my life and ministry on God’s Word and the leading of His Spirit. As a result, His blessings (along with many difficulties) have far surpassed anything I could have imagined. The Lord has honored and blessed my life, family and ministry in ways too numerous to mention. “Those who honor Me I will honor” (1 Samuel 2:30).

God works in mysterious ways. He brought together two people—as volatile and explosive as an earthquake and a volcano—through that photo in my high school yearbook to use us to accomplish His future purpose. That was over 50

years ago and so the story continues!

Who would have believed that two teenagers, who ran away and got married, could survive the tremendous obstacles we faced and, one day, direct a growing international outreach ministry? Against all odds and all reasonable hope, in many ways and at many times, God has done the impossible! Dr. Guy Bongiovanni, a pastor, then missions director and finally general overseer of the Christian Church of North America, wrote the following about me and Karen:

Bill is a trophy of God's grace. I would characterize his and Karen's ministry with the word stability. They are not only devoted followers of Christ, but Bill is a very careful scholar in his research, and he is aggressively in pursuit of winning people to Christ. I have always respected Bill's discipline concerning exercise and nutrition. Esther and I are very proud of Bill and Karen.

Not Done in a Corner

During his defense before the Roman Governor Festus and King Agrippa, the Apostle Paul stated, "For the king knows about these matters and I speak to him also with confidence, since I am persuaded that none of these things escape his notice; for this has not been done in a corner"(Acts 26:26). Likewise, the accounts I have shared in this book have not been done in a corner. There have been many eyewitnesses throughout the years.

The illustrations and accounts I shared in this book are trustworthy and true to the best of my recollections and the records I kept in the journals since becoming a believer in Christ.

The preceding are highlights of just a few of the amazing accounts regarding how the Lord has taken seemingly impossible situations and made them possible. Time and space do not permit me to tell of all the astonishing feats the Lord has done. Eternity will reveal the faithfulness of God in all of our lives.

There have been numerous times in my life that God intervened in undeniably miraculous ways. There have also been many times that my prayers and those of my wife, children and grandchildren have not been answered in miraculous ways. The impossible healing or desired miracle did not occur. However, the main focus of this book is to share highlights of some of the numerous times the impossible and miraculous happened.

Saved from Certain Tragedy by God's Amazing Mercy

The odds of an 18- and 17-year-old remaining married were against us—especially since our total income was only \$10 a week. Almost everyone said our marriage would not last a year. Yet, by God's grace we have been married for over 50 years. While many thought our ministry could never survive, it has been going and growing for more than 45 years.

Looking back over my life and ministry, I am amazed by God's great grace and mercy. There is no doubt, He spared me from certain tragedies such as:

Violent death—My rebellious lifestyle of foolish and out-of-control behavior should have (and eventually would have) led to a violent end or prison had I not given my life to Christ at the age of 18.

Dying in some gutter—If a violent death did not terminate my life as a teen, living on the street or lying in some gutter choking on my own vomit would have eventually been the tragic result of my abusive and self-destructive lifestyle.

Degenerative disease or cancer—If a violent death or dying in some gutter would not have been my just end, then it is apparent that some degenerative disease would have slowly consumed my body and killed me many years ago from my out-of-control and overindulgent lifestyle which violated God's natural health laws and biblical principles.

An eternity in hell—Had my foolish pride and rebellion kept me from receiving Jesus Christ as my Savior, I would have been without hope, eternally separated from the Creator and all the wonders He has planned for those who love and obey Him.

Reflect back on your own life. If you believe in Jesus Christ, then be amazed and appreciative of His incomprehensible love and mercy. If you are not yet a believer in Christ, then reflect on what your life and eternity could be in Christ. Or if you continue to reject Him until your last breath, consider what your eternal destiny will be.

And the testimony is this, that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son (1 John 5:11).

Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ (Romans 5:1).

I often wondered why God chose someone like me: a kid from the West Hill with little hope or potential to do the impossible. I believe it was to manifest His wisdom through my foolishness, and His strength through my weakness.

“Therefore I am well content with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ’s sake; for when I am weak, then I am strong” (2 Corinthians 12:10).

The testimony of my life-long journey affirms God’s grace and faithfulness. The Lord has protected, provided, intervened and fulfilled all that He led me to do. He has enabled me, with the help of my wife and countless others, to fulfill the vision He put in my heart!

I am no extraordinary person who has the secret to getting what he wants from God. I am just an ordinary person who believes God can do the impossible. As I reflect on the highlights of my life and ministry, I am aware of the many miracles the Lord has done. By focusing on these miracles out of context with the rest of my life, it might seem as though I experienced constant miracles.

However, sometimes, I went for months or even more than a year through a wilderness during which God molded and trained me without any apparent supernatural intervention. I had to walk by faith and persevere in spite of the circumstances.

In the same way, if you take Scripture out of context when looking at the lives of Moses, Elijah, Daniel, Paul and others, it may seem like they had constant miracles. The entire picture, however, shows this not to be true.

Boast in the Lord

The accounts in this book are intended to build your faith, encourage you in your walk with Christ and testify to the faithfulness of the Lord. They are not meant for self-glorification, but to give all the glory to God! Self-praise is worthless. Besides, how could someone who was completely helpless and hopeless boast concerning something he fully received from the Lord? As the Apostle Paul stated:

Therefore in Christ Jesus I have found reason for boasting in things pertaining to God. For I will not presume to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me (Romans 15:17-18).

Paul also said, “But HE WHO BOASTS IS TO BOAST IN THE LORD. For it is not he who commends himself that is approved, but he whom the Lord commends” (2 Corinthians 10:17-18). Paul continued on in chapters 11 and 12 of Second Corinthians to boast about his experiences as a believer in Christ.

Similar to Paul, I know that all that I am, all that I have and all that I will ever accomplish, I owe it all to the Lord. When we die (or Christ returns), all our accomplishments, degrees, credentials, awards, accolades and possessions will not matter.

More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ (Philippians 3:8).

At the end of our lives, all that will really matter is: Were we faithful to the Lord? What were the motives of our hearts? Did we honor Him with our lives? Were we wise stewards of the talents and resources He entrusted to us? Did we fulfill the purpose for which He created and sustained us?

For More Information

Bill Rudge has produced numerous books, pamphlets and audio messages on a variety of timely topics. For a complete listing or a copy of his informative newsletter, visit www.billrudge.org or write to:

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